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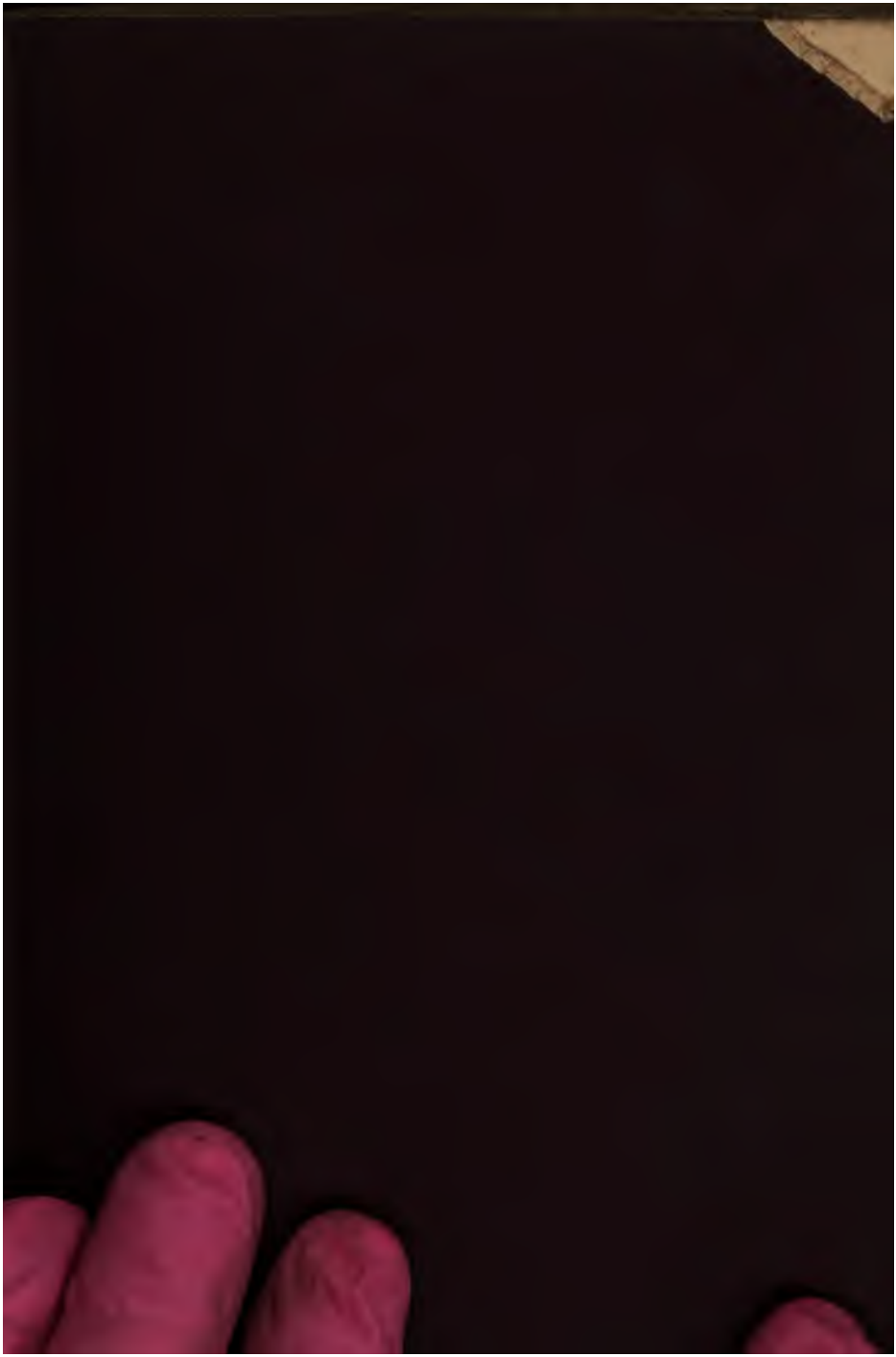

MARGERY TRAVERS.

VOL. II.

MARGERY TRAVERS

BY

A. E. N. BEWICKE

AUTHOR OF

"THE LAST OF THE JERNINGHAMES,"
"ONWARDS, BUT WHITHER?"
&c., &c.

"How shall a man escape from his ancestors, or draw off from his veins the black drop which he drew from his father's or his mother's life?"
EMERSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BOOK I.

(CONTINUED.)

TEMPTED.

MARGERY TRAVERS.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMONG THE LILIES AND THE ROSES.

THEY were all seated round the dinner-table, that expanse of silver epergnes and cut glass and flowers so often transformed into an instrument of torture by modern luxury. For the space of at least one hour and a half Lottie might expect to sit beside Dalrymple Bruce, looking across the table at Margery and Allan, sitting side by side, Margery rather cold and stately, Allan with an uncomfortable fear lest he might be boring her. Allan

had never been afraid of boring anyone before, but he was often now afraid lest he was boring Margery. It is a fear which generally brings its own fulfilment with it.

"Do you like my dress?" she had asked, as they had moved in to dinner. "It was very kind of Una to give it to me. Is it not pretty?"

"Lovely!—like everything you wear," Allan had answered, lovingly.

Margery's shoulders had absolutely moved; she could not be said to have shrugged them, but they had moved. She had not spoken to him about her dress æsthetically, or in any way difficult to answer—simply asked him whether he found it pretty or not, and even then he could not discriminate. Everything she wore was alike lovely to him. It certainly was discouraging.

Dalrymple noticed that movement of her

shoulders; he saw also that, as she sat down, she glanced round at all the luxury around her, and then glanced at Allan coldly, gravely, appraisingly, as if she were taking stock of him also, and that then she sighed. The artist's glowing eyes were fixed upon her, and forced her to look up; his expression seemed to say that he had read her thoughts.

"Only courage!" he murmured.

He spoke low and involuntarily, looking away quickly again as he did so, but Margery heard him, and looked down. She could not quite think what his words signified.

"What were you saying?" asked Lottie.

"Did I speak?" said he, starting. "I was only studying Miss Travers' face. I must certainly paint her. In what character?"

"As an enchantress," replied Lottie,

quickly. "And you can put a row of men standing staring like stuck pigs, with their mouths open. That is the way you all stand, when Miss Travers comes into the room."

The artist flashed a quick glance at her.

"Does Stapleton stand like a stuck pig?" he asked.

Lottie's eyes flashed too, while her face flushed a little.

"No, he doesn't. Besides, he has a right to look at her; he is engaged to her. But I hate to see Lord Talboys and the others. They are a well-assorted pair," she added, carelessly, tossing her head in the direction of Margery and Allan.

"Admirably," answered the artist, much in the same tone.

Lottie stared at him.

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"I think it a thing to be admired at, if

not admired, that two such different characters should have come together," replied the artist, again thrown off his guard. "A woman full of fire and flame and genius to marry an inanity——"

"You certainly do not read faces so well as I should expect, if you find Mr. Stapleton's inane."

"It may be full of meaning," replied the artist, contemptuously. "But not for her. To her it is inane. Good heavens! why does she marry him? She had such a noble contempt for the things most women care for, when I knew her last. She had it in her to be something so very great. And to think that she should marry for a little money in the end! It must cost her terribly."

"She is not marrying for money," replied Lottie, quickly. "He has next to nothing; and, besides—I despise the girl,

but this much I will say for her, she would marry him just the same, if he lost every penny he possesses. So much good there certainly is in her."

The artist flashed another quick glance at her. Then he looked across the table at Margery, as if he, out of all there, were her friend, and knew all about her, and she knew he did. Margery was surprised into an answering glance.

"You despise her?"

"Must not a woman always despise another woman, when she sees her so little valuing a man's true love and devotion? Allan Stapleton is worth ever so many of your beautiful Miss Travers, but she does not see it. She despises him."

Thus impetuously, and from her heart, spoke the New York belle, who generally treated it as a sort of matter-of-course that men should lose their hearts, and women despise them.

"He certainly is sufficiently in love with her," said the artist, after a few moments, musingly. "See, she has spoken to him, and he is taking salt with his pudding in consequence. A man might live on such a smile as that."

Whilst commenting on Allan's inadvertence, he was himself quite unaware that he was eating nothing. But Lottie replied drily,

"He would find it very poor living, I guess, and so will Mr. Stapleton, when he has nothing else to live upon. He is not the kind of man to make a fortune, and he had much better have fallen in love with a girl who had one ready made."

"What is a fortune?" asked Dalrymple, leaning back now with the air of a real Bohemian, and contemplating the heiress half satirically. "Remember, you speak to an unbeliever in the god of the period.

I might have been heir to a place at least as fine as this, and unembarrassed, but I chose to be an artist, and was disinherited. It grieved my mother dreadfully, and that I shall always regret, but my life would have been simply thrown away had I given up Art. I told my uncle so, and that he might do what he liked with his money, and make what will he liked, for all I cared."

"And the end of it all is, you paint portraits for money. I do not call that Art," said Lottie, contemptuously.

The hour and a half were nearly at an end, but the time was dragging so, she could not be commonly courteous any longer. Besides, she was thoroughly put out, and when an American girl is so, she generally shows it very plainly, differing in this as much as in anything from her English cousin, who does not commonly air her little tempers in society.

The artist, however, was not easily affronted. He smiled a pitying smile as he thought to himself—"So she is in love with him too! What can there be in that Stapleton, I wonder? An heiress and a *prima donna!* *Prima donna*, indeed! She is only *donna* in the world for me. But he can't make her love him—he can't succeed in that. Yet she'll marry him all the same, my peerless Madge Travers, the lady of my dreams for so many years, and people will say she has done well for herself, I daresay. Yet she might as well marry a duke, as she isn't a bit in love. And to think of this little Yankee belle caring so much for him! I like the girl, though—I honour her. Not even in her jealousy of her rival will she lower the man she loves in her own eyes by acknowledging that he is being married for his money, I like her spirit. Dear me! why

doesn't the fellow see what's good for him, and leave Madge alone?"

"You promised you would sing to me," he said to Margery, when the gentlemen rejoined the ladies after dinner.

Margery rose at once and went to the piano.

"What shall I sing?" she asked.

There was a great charm about her docility; people expected to meet with resistance from her, and, meeting none, were surprised agreeably; yet there was a possibility of this docility becoming monotonous. With Allan the possibility seemed very near at hand, for he was docile also. His conversations with Miss Spluck were much more animated than those with Margery; the Yankee girl's spirit had not been early broken by a too rough world. But neither had Dalrymple's; he was quite untamed as yet, and Margery's docility did

not risk making conversation with him dull.

"Sing something full, and rich, and passionate." "Like your face," his eyes added for him. "I like lights and shades, and everything that appeals to the emotions. I am not really musical, unfortunately, but no man can follow up two arts."

Yet Margery felt that she was singing to a connoisseur, and as she finished, Dalrymple hummed a bar with a slightly different rendering from what she had given to the words, and she saw at once the improvement, and sang the last part of the song over again. All the other people in the room, with their want of true musical appreciation, had faded into nonentities for her, and she was conscious only of Dalrymple, who alone appreciated her song. Yet when the others applauded, he remained silent.

"You are beyond compliment," he said, when they had finished. "I look upon it as impertinence. That *felicitá* alone would have won you a dozen encores in any capital in Europe."

"You think so," said Margery, casting her eyes down humbly, as before a great critic, and then looking up again questioningly. "And you think it such a little thing to be a lady in comparison?"

Dalrymple's eyes answered for him. "I shall paint you as a *prima donna*," he said.

Lottie was so near that her dress was rustling against Margery's, but their hearts were far as the poles asunder. It was some time already since a friendly word had been exchanged between them. Lottie was looking pale now, glancing up at Allan, as her fingers trifled with the flowers in her dress. What a sweet face it was, that of the American heiress. No man who look-

ed at her ever wished to see her tricked out in jewelry. Lottie would look just as pretty in a cotton gown in a cottage parlour as she ever could look. And she seemed to have learnt her own style at last. Nothing could have surpassed the apparent simplicity of her white muslin dress this evening, though a scrutinising eye might perhaps have discovered that it was not quite so simple as it appeared. Anyhow, she had never looked prettier or sweeter, as thought Harry Yorke, who had made a compact of friendship with her in their first ride together, and broken it in the very making. He had said to her,

"If you weren't such an awfully great heiress, I believe I should have been head over ears in love with you long ago. But as it is, every time I look at you, I see the spectre of your money-bags keeping guard over you."

"Well, give up the idea of falling in love with me, and let us be friends—real, true, good friends. I believe that will exorcise the spectre as well as anything," Lottie had replied, laughingly.

She called him Harry from that time forward, and vowed he was a regular Englishman, and one of the best young fellows in the world. But Harry never presumed to call her Lottie, and he sometimes wished she would not be quite so friendly with him. He knew she was an heiress, of course, and he knew he was head over ears in debt, but he was head over ears in love too, poor Harry! In truth, he would not have been in such difficulties, had he ever learnt the art of concentrating his attention upon money matters, and he could not acquire it now on a sudden. He could not be always remembering that Miss Spluck was a great heiress. There were other

things about her, that had much more of interest and of charm for him.

He thought he had never seen her look sweeter than this evening. As for Margery, he admired her beauty very much, and also her singing, but he agreed with Lottie in thinking that she was not the kind of girl a man would care to marry. Now Lottie was.

Allan also thought Lottie had never looked prettier, as he came up to her, and said to her, it was a long time since he had heard her sing. Would she not give them a song that evening?

"What! after Miss Travers!" exclaimed Lottie. "Who would venture to sing after Miss Travers?"

"Does her music deprive us of all else?" asked Allan, looking down into her pensive, upturned face with his kindly, straightforward glance.

"Yes, it deprives you of all else," said Lottie, with a bitter little laugh.

She had always been capricious, but she seemed to have become yet more capricious of late. Though she had only accepted the invitation to the Priory on condition that Dalrymple Bruce should come there also to paint her picture, and had paid him a fancy price of her own for it beforehand, yet she would not consent to give him a sitting next day.

"Paint me as I am here," said she, with a little impatient shrug of her shoulders, "sitting among the roses and the lilies. I am not going to shut myself up in a stuffy room on a day like this—no, not for all the Academies in the world."

One of Dalrymple's conditions had been that the picture was to be exhibited when finished.

"I can take a sketch of you in this way,

if you like," said the artist, who could not afford to lose his time, and yet was in no mood to humour the heiress's caprices. He looked dispirited and pre-occupied this morning. There was no glow in his face or in his eyes; no one, to see him now, would have taken him for the enthusiast of the evening before. "I see my first idea of your face was quite wrong," he said, with an air of contrition over his mistake. "It will not do to paint you in a cloud of white tulle and pink roses, such as one sees at least a dozen of in the Academy every year. Your portrait must be much less conventional, with something pensive and romantic about it."

"Yes, just as she is sitting now," said Margery, softly, "her hands lightly folded on her lap, the flowers dropping through her fingers, and those two tall white lilies standing up against the sky behind her.

Only I should like it to be evening, and the sky a much deeper colour, and one last lingering ray, which one feels must fade in another minute, lighting up her face and hair."

"Excellent! excellent!" cried the artist, his face brightening as his eyes met Margery's, and looked deep into them for a moment. "How did you think it all out? That is the very thing, only I must change places with you, then, please. You remember *Les Illusions Perdues* at the Luxembourg?" he continued, looking anxiously at Lottie, who still sat with her head drooped, and the flowers dropping through her fingers, as though she had no part in the conversation.

"As if she had made a mistake, and couldn't help it," said Margery.

"But I have made no mistake!" cried Lottie, raising her head impetuously.

"Please sit still, Miss Spluck," said Dalrymple, with a tone of irritation. "I will try to do the best I can out here, since you wish it. But if you are to move incessantly, there is no use in my attempting anything. Your face a little more turned away, please, as you were before. You can see presently how you like the *pose*."

Lottie fell back into her former attitude listlessly, only raising her eyebrows a little at the tone of authority, which in general would have inclined her to insubordination. But she was too languid for that just then.

They had wandered into a part of the garden laid out in accordance with Lady Mary's suggestions. Lady Mary said she would as soon make herself into a geometrical figure as let her flowers grow in one, and often protested against the apparent connection in the modern mind between geraniums and ribbon gardening,

carrying her prejudice against the latter so far as not even to admit the former among her favourite flowers, at least not in their dwarf variety. She had no objection to a geranium as a bush, covered with loose hanging crimson petals. Thus two tall virgin lilies stood behind Lottie on one side; on the other, a bush of monthly roses almost pushed itself into her lap, whilst Margery's dark hair was lighted up by a rich scarlet salvia, and at the same time she had nothing to do but put out her hand, and gather a whole handful of sweet-scented carnations.

Una had, of course, chosen a lowly seat embowered in white jasmine, her favourite place. She was busily employed rigging a miniature boat that Allan had made out of a walnut shell; he was rather clever at such contrivances. Lord Talboys, who was not equally clever, was helping her. Harry

Yorke lay like a dog at Lottie's feet, and gathered up the mangled flowers that she let fall. Margery had got hold of an accordion, and every now and then played little wailing melodies upon it. Dalrymple alone was hard at work; he was one of those artists whose first sketches are fascinating, and he knew everyone would be pleased; the colour deepened on his cheek as he painted. Sir James Stapleton came out and looked at them. He said, jocosely, he had heard of a flower called Love in Idleness, but he had no idea till now what a plentiful crop there was of it in his garden. Well, anyhow it was better than Love in the Mist, and he laughed and went away, saying Allan was no good now, and he must look after everything himself.

"Is there anything you ought to do?" asked Margery, dropping her accordion.

"No, nothing. Sit still. What can I

do better than sit and look at you?" was his reply.

How was it that Margery met Dalrymple's eye just at that moment? Properly he ought to have been looking at Miss Spluck, and not at all in her direction. She coloured deeply, and picked up her accordion.

"You will make me cry, if you go on with that much longer," said Lottie, pettishly. "It is bad enough to have one's picture painted pensive, and having made a mistake. But you've played one heart-broken air after another, till really I feel quite inclined to thank Lord Talboys for laughing, though I know it is only over some mistake he has made. Why can't we all laugh over our mistakes?"

A dead silence.

"Oh, my! since when have I been sent to Coventry, that nobody answers when I

speak?" asked the heiress, laughingly.

"My dear Miss Spluck, what's the matter?" asked Una, looking round. "Did you ever see such a duck of a sail? Lord Talboys made it all himself."

"If that isn't lovely!" cried Lottie. "When, with my own eyes, I saw you cut it out, and sew it yourself, and the two of you have been at least half an hour fixing it between you. Am I not fixed yet, Mr. Bruce? I've sat so still, I doubt if I'll ever be able to move again, if I don't move soon."

"This will give you some idea of the effect I wish to produce," said the artist, turning his unfinished sketch towards her.

She bent forward, and took it in her own hands.

"How do you like it?" she asked, addressing Allan, who, from his position on

the grass, was conveniently placed for looking over her shoulder.

"It is very pretty," he said, hesitatingly —"very pretty indeed. I daresay it will be very like you. But I should like to see you looking quite different."

"Me, or my picture?" asked Lottie.

"Both," replied Allan, decidedly, after moving a little and looking into her face for a moment. "I didn't think you looked like—that kind of girl. And now I see you do. But you were quite different when you danced through a whole waltz with me last season. You wouldn't keep it up so long now, I am afraid."

"Try," pouted the petted beauty. "Why don't you have some dancing here? You English never do seem to have a real nice time of it. Now if this were America, there'd be gales of laughter and dancing every evening."

"Gales of laughter!" said Allan. "How nice! I wish we were in America! But we'll do our best for you here, Miss Spluck. Una, how soon can we get up a ball? You would like it, too, wouldn't you, Margery?"

Her eyes did not meet the artist's this time, but she saw his colour deepen as she answered, in her most docile tone,

"Yes, very much."

"I don't know what you mean, Stapleton," said Harry Yorke. "I think this sketch perfectly delightful; and if the picture is only like it, I am sure it will collect the greatest crowd in the Academy."

Then they all looked at the sketch, and were delighted. Only Margery said nothing. Dalrymple sat with his eyes fixed on the ground and a settled colour on his cheeks, and, instead of being elated by his

praises, looked rather like a dog that had been beaten.

At last he got up, and began putting away his sketch. As he did so, he said, very low,

"Have I failed to carry out your idea, Miss Travers?"

Margery looked up surprised.

"My idea!" she said. "It is only you who have got an idea—you only are aiming at something, and we all—are just *getting* through life. Yes, I like your sketch very much."

He looked up now, and she saw his eyes were full of tears.

"*Thank* you," he said, but with such a sigh of relief that Harry Yorke clapped him on the shoulder, and said,

"Why, old fellow, Miss Spluck was very much pleased with your sketch. You're not out of heart with it, are you?"

"No—not now," said Dalrymple, and walked off with it into the house.

His was a nature that demanded sympathy, and somehow he also had felt that he was quite differently placed from all the others—he alone at work, and for his bread. But not till Margery had spoken had his position seemed a glorious one. Then she put him on a pedestal, and made him pitiful of her that she did not stand there also. But these natures that demand so much sympathy are not the most sympathetic. Dalrymple went into the house, all his thoughts concentred on himself, and happy that she pronounced his art not ignoble, he having already recognised hers as the noblest, such as he had once dreamed—but, alas! dreamed only—his might also be. Deep hidden in his heart was the sense of failure. He had dreamt sublimely, and thus drawing-room praises

passed over him unheeded; not so criticism, for the inner voice echoed that, and intensified it. But when Margery expressed satisfaction with his sketch, he accepted her praise as that of one for whom the laurel crown was already twined, would she but bend her head to receive it, and he looked at his sketch, and saw that that, at least, was charming, and set to work to prepare his canvas for the finished picture with redoubled ardour.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAY-DREAM.

WHEN Dalrymple Bruce first talked of painting Margery, Allan was rather taken by the idea, but when he found she was not to sit to him like Lottie in the garden, but in an artistically darkened room, and with fixed hours for sittings, he would gladly have discouraged the whole proceeding. Everyone, however, seemed against him. Lady Stapleton said languidly it would be a pity for her not to do so, and Sir James called it a lucky chance, while Una quietly drew Margery's arm through her own, saying,

"Come with me, and I'll dress you, and arrange everything. Now don't fuss, Allan; Miss Spluck and some of the other ladies are going to ride, and they will want cavaliers. You can surely spare Margery for one afternoon."

"How are you going to be painted, dearest?" asked Allan. His voice always had a different tone when he spoke to her, and he looked at her beseechingly.

But Margery did not look up, though her colour deepened.

"Mr. Bruce said as a *Prima Donna*, so I hope I am to have a carpet of bouquets at my feet, and a curtain behind me, I suppose."

They had entered the room now, which Dalrymple had already arranged as a studio, and where he was receiving them with the manner in which he generally did the honours of his studio, not at all as if

he had been spending all the morning with them, and were staying in the house.

Allan's brow darkened a little.

"As a *Prima Donna*. Is not that rather a common idea? One has seen quantities of *Prima Donnas*."

"You know Miss Travers' face so well, perhaps you would advise me," said Dalrymple, retreating a little with his arms folded in a manner peculiar to himself, and with an elaborate courtesy not at all calculated to encourage Allan to proffer his advice. "Friends often give hints. If you would kindly seat yourself in that armchair, Miss Travers, your face a little more to the light. What do you think of that *pose?*" he asked of Allan.

"Miss Travers must always look beautiful in every position," said Allan, with dignity. "But would it not be better to think of some idea as you did for Miss

Spluck? Do you mean it to be a portrait, or a fancy picture?"

"Both—either," said the artist, carelessly, forgetting himself for the moment in the contemplation of Margery, sitting passive before them with that graceful *abandon* so distinctly not English. "An ideal."

"An ideal!—*your* ideal?" Allan looked up a little surprised.

"My ideal! No, indeed. I should be proud of such a conception. But just as Miss Travers is sitting now with her chin resting on her hand, and her eyes far away, one might call it the Day-Dream. She is at all times beautiful as a dream." He added, as if to himself, "Too beautiful to be true." Then, rousing himself by an effort from his reverie, "You said, Miss Stapleton, you had some Indian shawls. Would you allow me to try the effect?

Here! are they? A thousand thanks," and he moved towards a sofa on which Una was already displaying the shawls.

"That is a pretty simile for you, Margery," said Allan, turning and bending over her now. "Beautiful as a dream, too beautiful to be true."

"Do you think me false, then?" asked Margery, looking up now almost fiercely.

"My dearest, you know I did not mean that."

"No, dear Allan, no. I know *you* did not. But Mr. Bruce, he is full of *doubles entendres*."

"How do you know that already?" asked Allan, glancing at the artist, who, with his back turned, appeared fully intent upon the shawls.

Margery looked confused for a moment, then she said, "I knew him long ago."

"Only for three days, I thought?"

"That is a long time sometimes," said Margery.

"Now, Allan, you and I must vanish," cried Una. "Mr. Bruce has chosen his drapery and prepared his canvas, and he must be left to devise his own positions. It is such bad taste to interfere," she whispered, "when you have not ordered the picture. Or have you, perhaps?"

"No," said Allan. "Am I in your way, Mr. Bruce?" speaking very stiffly and politely.

"Not at all, not at all," said Dalrymple, almost equally stiffly. "I am only afraid you may find it rather tedious. Miss Travers has been good enough to promise me a regular sitting, such as I am afraid I am never likely to obtain from Miss Spluck. Americans do not quite understand the exigencies of portrait-painting, and that a model is then really a necessity."

"Stapleton! Stapleton! *are—you—coming?*" shouted Harry Yorke, from the garden. "The horses have been round this half hour, and the ladies are tired of waiting."

"Well, good-bye, dearest," and Allan passed his arm round Margery and kissed her. He was often rather too demonstrative a lover for these conventional modern days, and Margery seemed to think so now, as she sat stony, impassive, without looking up, as he kissed her. Then, just as he reached the door, she sprang from her seat.

"Dear Allan, I had forgotten. Your horse must not miss his lump of sugar; I have it in my pocket. I will be back again directly," and twining her hands round his arm, she left the room with him.

Dalrymple kept no guard over his countenance, as he leant against the wall with

his arms folded, neither did he and Una exchange a syllable while she was gone. They were both of them acting a part, and so conscious of doing so that there seemed to be no need to fatigue themselves by keeping it up while there was no audience. At last the horses' feet were heard retreating, and Margery returned. Then Una came forward from the cosy corner of the sofa, where she had been resting, ready now to play her part with double energy, being not at all certain how the artist might be inclined to sustain his.

"Let me drape this shawl about you," said she, in her silkiest tone; "I am sure no man can do it as a woman can. Sketch her as the 'Day-Dream' to-day, Mr. Bruce, *do!* I am sure that will inspire you to think of something yet better. And now, good-bye; Lord Talboys must be waiting for his game of billiards. How cross he

will be! I like people to be cross; it makes a variety."

"No accounting for tastes," said Dalrymple, as Una paused at the door for a moment, and looked back. Then—"The Spirit of the Foam, indeed! I could paint a better Spirit of the Foam than that!"

"You do not know her," said Margery, earnestly; "she has a kind, good heart. She only puts on that appearance——"

"Of intending to marry Lord Talboys?"

"I cannot understand that in her," said Margery, colouring.

"I certainly admire her courage," said the artist. "There she is—young, with probably a long life before her—about twenty, I suppose, and she has already decided for herself that money is the one great good in life, and she means to have it, and nothing can deter her from it—neither age, nor coarseness of thought, nor

a vicious life, nor anything. If I could win the touch of Raphael by it, I couldn't make up my mind to marry Lord Talboys. But she is quite right. He has money, and she wants it. Only I admire her resolution and the strong-minded way in which she carries it through. She never pretends to like him. She says—Here's my youth and beauty, take them and welcome, only give me your money. There's no deception about it, no soul-sacrifice, as when a woman pretends to love a man whom she feels all the time to be her inferior."

Margery's chin was resting on her hand, her eyes gazing far away; she gazed defiantly without answering. Dalrymple, however, was painting her picture, and had a right to look steadily at her. The silence became more and more oppressive. At last, with the colour burning in her cheeks, and tears threatening to come into

her eyes, she said, in faltering tones,

"Miss Stapleton laughs at love marriages."

She could not, of course, see the expression with which he looked up, but she heard the bitter little laugh with which he replied,

"Of course, what can be more foolish? There was your father, he made a love marriage, and, as he said to me one day, it had not made either of them happy, and ruined both their prospects for life. Your mother might have been an operatic success, but she was a domestic failure. I am only quoting his words. He might have stayed on in the Army but for his marriage, and he was very popular in his regiment, I believe. He could be a pleasant companion when he chose."

Margery looked round for a moment with her heart warming towards the

artist. She always felt like a different person when she heard any, even the faintest, praise of her father; she had been so bitterly ashamed of him towards the end of his life, she would never quite rally again from the humiliations he had brought upon her. It was like lifting the heavy shroud-like cloud that still darkened her life, for anyone even to speak of him as a man who could be spoken of.

"I recollect his talking to me about it all," continued the artist. "It was one moonlight night at Florence, when I went for a stroll, after you had been sitting to me all the afternoon. He said his marriage had been a mistake, and then he went on: 'And for the end of it all there's Madge, poor girl, with no one but a spendthrift father to knock about the world with, getting a good deal bruised too in the process.' I know he wasn't kind to you,

your father, but he was very proud of you, Madge, and he was sorry himself that it wasn't in his nature to be kinder to you. After all, there have been many worse men than your father."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Margery, dreamily. "How long ago that all seems now! And it is long ago for you, for since then you have achieved success. While I—I have done nothing. Do you know I used always to think you would have gone to the dogs." That was one of the few slang phrases that still clung about Margery. She had heard it so often as a child.

"Did you?" He spoke carelessly, but a man of his temperament could not fail to be stung by the idea. "That was very kind of you. You have moved, though, your head a little more—" and he advanced, and apparently without thinking, placed it

in the old position. A thrill passed through Margery, as she felt his slight, nervous fingers touch her hair. But Dalrymple was yet more affected by his own temerity, he was unnerved by it, and he remained standing still beside her. "Perhaps I have gone to the dogs," he said, mournfully.

"Why, you are an artist, and the fashion."

"The fashion! Oh, yes! I paint portraits for money, as Miss Spluck said to me the other night. And it is the fashion to sit to me, oh, yes!" He went back to his canvas, and tried to determine whether she were in the right position now. "Madge," he said at last, laying down his brushes, and looking steadily at her, "do you recollect those talks we had? I told you all my day-dreams then. I had never told them to anyone before. Well, they have all come to nothing."

"To nothing!" said Margery, faintly. She felt that he was speaking frankly, and from his heart now. It would not do to pay him back in mere surface words; but though she had learned to talk lightly, even to think lightly at times, yet when she thought seriously it was still as bitterly as of old. "After all, what is success? What is there worth living for? Oh, Dal—Mr. Bruce, I mean, what is life given us for, do you think?"

"To make a mess of, I should say," said the artist, mixing paints violently now. "But you always used to call me Dal. The world is hollow enough as it is without our adding another fiction to it, that of pretending to be strangers. It always seems to me such an absurdity to change names. Of course I've thought of you as Madge all these years, and you've thought of me as Dal. That is, if you have thought of me?"

"Let us talk seriously then," said Margery, without heeding his last question, "as you used to do. Of course life wasn't *given* us to make a mess of. If religion is true——"

"Yes, if it is," interrupted the artist.

"Then there must be something for us to do worth the doing," continued Margery, not heeding the interruption.

"If religion is true, God is good, and wishes his creatures to be happy."

"Happy is very easily *said*," pleaded Margery.

"Yes, very easily said," grumbled Dalrymple, painting steadily now, and looking anything but happy. "When I get everything my own way, and do exactly what I like, then I'm all right."

"But if your doing what you like interferes with me?"

"Then so much the worse for you," said

he, almost savagely. Then in a very different tone.—"Oh, I've lived through all that! I've sacrificed enough, I'm sure. I don't care for money particularly, even now, or position either, though I know something more about their value than when last we met. But I've always known how to spend time pleasantly without spending money, so that it has never been of as much value to me as to most men. And, you see, when I was a mere lad I thought painting was the one thing worth doing well, and I sacrificed everything to it, and broke my poor mother's heart," his voice trembled, and he flushed as he spoke, "and vexed my old uncle, who had done everything he could to please me all my life, till then. However, I didn't care—or rather I made up my mind it was all necessary, for I did care even then, and if anyone thinks I care less now, that only shows

pagne dinner to the few friends I possessed, and there was not much of that £20 left, and so it went on. Only in that way could I paint such things. I had to keep my imagination in an unhealthy, fevered state, and it wasn't difficult to me, more's the pity, perhaps. Abject misery, and then a life of rioting and luxury, don't put a man into the healthiest state of body and mind. And I was ill, I think, all the time—at least, I think so now. I didn't think so then, I only thought I had become more impressionable. But if one is impressionable, one is easily impressed by anything one comes across, and there's a good deal more evil than good in the world, I fancy. I began to realise I was going down-hill, and I pulled up short, and tried to lead a steady life," his voice trembled as when he had spoken of his mother. "I don't say I tried as hard as I might have, but

—I did try. I thought of you, and how, if we ever should meet again—— It does no good talking about it now. It didn't last long. My health gave way, and I couldn't paint a picture to save my life. Well, here goes! I thought. I've sacrificed my prospects in this life, here goes for those in the next, unless being an artist is the one thing I was born into the world for, and then I'm only fulfilling my vocation. I lived as before, and painted; you heard what Lord Talboys said about *genre* pictures?" So he had felt it afterwards, she thought, though at the time too much absorbed to seem to notice it. "By degrees I drifted into portrait-painting. If the women are pretty it is pleasant enough. The worst of it is the plain ones will come too, and one can hardly refuse them straight off the reel. I make enough money to get along with now, but it is too

late to go in for High Art. For that I should have studied when I was a lad. And I have never studied really, and as far as Art is concerned, I might as well have remained my uncle's heir, and sacrificed nothing. So now don't talk to me of high aims, and the object of life. Sell yourself dear, if you sell yourself at all. That's what I say."

Margery had not been looking at him, she had sat immoveable in the position in which he had placed her, gazing far away, as it appeared. He seemed to be laying not only his life, but his whole nature bare before her, and she felt as if she should learn too much, were she to look at him; she heard the tremble in his voice, and the rapid changes of tone. Their positions seemed to be reversed from what they had been of old; it was he who was bitter and scornful now; but she could not an-

swer him with the glad confidence with which he had once spoken to her, only she looked up at him with that pathetic quiver of the mouth that lent such pathos to her face.

"I know how being hungry makes everything seem to go wrong. It is not the hunger itself only, it is the humiliation, as if one were not worth the feeding, when everyone else is. But some men would have fought it out. I feel as if I could have—if I had had no one else to drag me down," she added, hurriedly. "Are you sure you did not aim at two things at once—present pleasure, future fame? Do you know whether it was the good of Art itself, or your own glory that you coveted through Art?" She was speaking naked truth without any pretty turns of phrase, or fancy veils, such as men and women commonly use in their talks with one ano-

ther. The truth was too cold and hard for Dalrymple. Like most people, he would not receive it thus unadorned; he regained self-command at once, and folded his arms, and prepared to meet it as a foe, and prove that it was false. Margery saw the change that passed over his face, and seeing him once more a man, felt herself a woman, and a yet greater failure, as it seemed. Though, after all, they were both young yet to decide whether their lives had been wasted or not. But it generally is when people are young that they come to these melancholy decisions, and in middle age people have greater tolerance for their own shortcomings as well as for those of others. She was only one and twenty, and she said, mournfully, "Yet, after all, you have done something, and I—I have done nothing, and I have gifts, too."

"Gifts, too! Do not lower yourself by comparing yourself with me. If I had as great a gift for painting as you have for singing I should be a Titian at the least. You want nothing but a little study to bring out your voice, and teach you some inflections that you do not yet distinguish, besides tricks of tone that are of no real value, but which yet tell upon the multitude. That you should bury your gift of song seems a sin, indeed!" He was forgetting himself for a moment, and the part he was playing, and that he could not hold her at a disadvantage, if he once allowed himself to exalt Art, in which she was so much his superior. He recollected himself, and it was more bitterly than ever that he spoke, as he went back to his easel, and took up his brushes again. "But if there is anything else you value more, do so by all means, only get full

value, mind. There's Lord Talboys now, I wonder you do not think of him; he is as rich as Crœsus, and he'd throw over little Snowdrift to-morrow, if you would but look at him."

"What, Una!" cried Margery. "Do you think he doesn't really admire her?"

"Oh, he admires her! But he admires you also. He admires all beautiful women, does Lord Talboys, and quite right too."

"You forget Allan," said Margery, with a deepening colour. "He loves me."

"Yes, he loves you," said Dalrymple, in a tone as dry as his brush, with which he was notwithstanding apparently working steadily.

"And I love him," said Margery, speaking even more softly than before.

No answer from the artist, but he seemed to become at last aware of the

state of his brush, and he began painting really, but probably background, for he never once glanced at his model, but remained working with his head bent, and the muscles of his face quite rigid.

"Do you not believe I love him?" asked Margery.

"No!" Dalrymple would not look up.

"You are the second person who has told me so," remarked Margery.

"Indeed! Who was the first?"

"Una."

"Miss Stapleton. Perhaps she had just as soon she was right, and that you should not marry her brother either."

"I do not know about that," said Margery. "We have never talked about that. They each go their own way, Allan and Una; they get on very well together, but they do not interfere much with each other. However, I do not care what any-

one thinks. I know I mean to be a good wife."

"I wonder what you understand by being a good wife, Miss Travers," said Dalrymple, determinedly, his better self gaining the mastery, and looking at her earnestly now. "I understand something more by it myself than glancing up at a man with a quivering mouth and beseeching eyes. I think a good wife should not be quite heart-whole, she should really love her husband, and enter into his pursuits *con amore*, so as to be able to reprove or encourage him when he desponds, recording as he requires one or the other. She should be his inspiring genius, in whose presence he felt at his noblest and best; her sympathy should so unlock the door of his heart that he should be compelled to speak to her more frankly than he had ever dared before to speak even to

himself. Thus she should both explain him to herself, and make him also worthier explanation." He had given over the pretence of painting, as he looked full into her face. "In each other's society both should feel themselves relieved from isolation, yet without that restraint that the society of even the best loved friend necessarily imposes." Margery's large grey eyes met his—she was rash as any of her race—then her eyes quivered, and the long lashes veiled them, as they slowly filled with tears, having tried vainly to gaze at fire and remain uninjured.

A little knock at the door, and there were Una and Lord Talboys.

"Are we interrupting very cruelly?" asked Una. "Margery, you must really come out, and get some fresh air, or else Allan will say you are looking pale, and must not sit again. Indeed, Mr. Bruce,

you are unconscionable. Do you not know that sitting for a picture is one of the most tiring things there is? May we look at the result of all these long hours? No! well, I suppose it would be wrong. Lord Talboys, profane eyes are not permitted. Oils never look well in the beginning. Cover it up, Mr. Bruce, and take it away. No one must see it till it is more advanced, not even Margery herself. Here! Margery, are a hat, and shawl, and gloves. Come out at once. You must go on with your sitting to-morrow."

Dalrymple's eyes glanced sarcastically at the little fair face, but Una looked as unconscious as if she were incapable of any deeper meaning, as he carried off his canvas to his room unseen, as he had been requested.

"That girl is inimitable," he said to himself; "she did not even change colour

as I looked at her. What a fortune she would make upon the stage! But how does it happen that she takes in not only poor Madge, but also that little Yankee girl, who I should have thought was sharp enough to see through a millstone. Yet they both swear she has a good heart. Heart, indeed! She is as heartless as a Persian kitten. But, Madge! Madge! you are not heartless. Why did we ever meet again? Or, rather, why were we ever parted? I have loved you always. I know it now. And now it is too late—too late. Well, it is as well for you. Far better for your peace of mind that you should marry that spoony Stapleton than a wild Bohemian like myself. And yet what a life we might have led together! Together? Never mind! I love you too much to ruin your peace of mind, and so, Miss Snowdrift, you shan't have it your

own way after all. If there is a sitting to-morrow, it shall be painting, not dreaming. Day-Dream indeed!"

It is one thing, however, to intend well, and quite another thing to carry out the intention. Dalrymple was always intending well, but next day there was a sitting again, and he—dreamt once more.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH HAVING NOUGHT TO DO.

A MOMENT'S reflection so abundantly convinces everyone that it would be for the happiness of all that the world should consist of people leading exemplary lives, that, were it not for a hundred anomalies of like nature, it would be a little curious to consider how rarely people look upon themselves as among the units that might go to the constituting such a world. By all means let Smith, Jones, and Brown keep the ten commandments, and enforce their doing so by law, if you can; but let me Robinson eat forbidden fruit. To my-

self I am no mere unit, but the being for whom the world and its pleasures were created. It is so hard to escape sorrow, let me filch happiness where I can. Yes, you may prove it to me logically or algebraically as you like. I grant it. Take *c* away from *x*, and that side of the equation remains a minus quantity, but then I am *a*, and I want *c*; and *x* is nothing to me in comparison.

Of course you say *nothing in comparison* is not an algebraical method of stating an equation, nor a logical form either. Granted! I will grant anything you like in reason. But in practice I am *a*, and I want *c*, and if I can get it I will, though the sum total of the happiness of the whole world may be infinitesimally diminished in consequence.

People cannot be prevailed upon to look upon themselves as units, any more than a

child can be persuaded that, if he eats all his sugar-plums now, he will have none left for to-morrow. "I want another now," he says.

And just in the same way speaks a grown-up man or woman.

"I know it is happier to do everything that is right, and nothing that is wrong, but I cannot help it—this one wrong thing I must do, and perhaps I was not born to be happy. Anyhow, this one thing I must do."

Over and over again it is acted out in the world's history. Let all others be virtuous and happy! but for me there can be no happiness at all, unless by sinning this one sin I have a mind to. Could we but alter the temper of our minds, in this one particular, who knows but Heaven might be around us now? It might not be necessary to *go* there then.

Margery had had her full share of what we commonly call trials in the course of her one and twenty years. She had known hunger, ill-usage, anxiety, insults, even disgrace—the disgrace a bad father inevitably brings upon his daughter. She had known dulness too, such dulness as you, reader, I hope can hardly even appreciate. Not counting all the dull times she had passed through before, she had lived for six months quite alone in a dingy London lodging without a friend or acquaintance, without any hope of ever having one, without any recollection even of a friend, that was agreeable to her, save that one recollection of Dalrymple Bruce, whom she had known for three days, and whom she verily believed, as she had told him herself, to have gone to the dogs.

Not even a letter had enlivened her solitude, no postman's knock had sounded for

her, she had not even had the variety of expecting it. Who was there in all the world who should write to her? Who was there that she had ever known who even knew where she was, or whether she were in existence or not? It is true Allan Stapleton had been four times to see her during those six months, but she could hardly be said to have known him before. She herself indeed looked upon him neither as acquaintance nor friend, simply as a man who had lent her money, and thus become that most hateful being in the whole world, a creditor, whom it was as yet impossible for her to repay. His visits were short and formal, and he, but for being her creditor, was as utterly indifferent to her as it is possible for a young man to be to a young woman.

And all through those long days and weeks, the girl was conscious of being just as hand-

some as she was at the Priory, where people stood back and paused in their conversation to look at her as she entered the room; of that dangerous style of beauty, too, that commands attention in the most crowded thoroughfare, and that attracts the coarsest as well as the most refined. She knew perfectly how beautiful she was; men had told her all about it ever since she could remember, and the natural pleasure in admiration had not been crushed out of her by a concentrating of her affections upon any one person, nor was she in too great grief for her father to be incapable of being pleased. Her affections and her powers of enjoyment were almost equally untried, yet she had made no single effort to procure herself pleasures of any kind. They did not seem to form a part of her lot in life, and she had accepted her lot unflinchingly and uncomplainingly. She

had hired a piano, regarding music of some kind as a necessary of life, and she had read, but rather diligently than eagerly.

Life was a puzzle to her—that is to say, it had occurred to her to reflect upon it; she thought books might explain it, men had certainly failed to do so. It was only books that bore upon life that she cared to read; but a hundred times she was forced to feel that she did not bring the proper training to them. The books might explain life, but not for her, she feared. She read perseveringly, but hopelessly. No light romances nor modern day poems found their way into her hands. In her Bohemian days she had come across many a smoke-scented novel of Balzac's, had even dipped into Paul de Kock. She entertained a horror of novels in consequence, and regarded them as something not quite respectable, like the life she had led till now.

She would have nothing to do with anything of the kind, and poetry to her was nearly as bad as novels. Did not Alfred de Musset recall to her this admirer that had disgusted her, and Heine that? Were not Beranger's *Chansons* an abomination to her? She regarded poetry as the accompaniment of a drinking revel, or as a method easy to the most stupid man of saying something even more impertinent than he would dare to say in his own words. She would read nothing that reminded her of her old life, for she meant to lead one as different as it was possible to lead—a quiet, staid, respectable life such as she believed the people now about her led. The people who live in dingy streets in the north of London certainly seem to have none of the sparkle of life, though it does not necessarily follow that they have all the virtue. And, as she had

told Allan, she had tried her very best.

It was a hundred pities that energetic curate had not laid forcible hands upon her, and led her into his choir, and into familiar intercourse with what he would have called the realities of life.

But, after all, when I say a hundred pities, that was for Margery; it might have been dangerous for the young man himself. As it was, she only heard his Rector's philosophical sermons upon abstract good, or his other technical sermons upon tithes and the exact nature of the Jewish sacrifice. I do not think the Jews would have been quite satisfied with his views upon the matter, neither indeed was Margery much edified. But she listened, and thought sermons rather dry, but probably only the more respectable on that account.

It is always very strange, that fact of the heathen in our midst, to whom

no Gospel message ever comes, no spiritual explanation of life's material mysteries. To the poor the message is sent, I believe. There are clergymen, and, as we all know, the so-called rich are no concern of theirs, so it is to be supposed they look after the poor. They are all very busy, it is said, and some certainly look pale and overstrained. But walk down the street, and count one, two, three, up to a hundred, if you like, all nice little houses representing certain incomes of some amount or other, and what glad tidings have any appointed ministers of religion ever borne to those homes? The dwellers within are sometimes very sick, or very sorrowful. Sometimes they marry; then there is a wedding service, for which they pay somewhat beyond their means. Sometimes children are born to them, and they pay again, and there are wedding breakfasts and christen-

ing dinners, to which the minister of religion is invited as a convivial guest. Last of all comes the funeral, and it is over, as far as bringing a message from a higher life to this life is concerned. Some of these people go to Church or Chapel. Some do not. Who knows? Who cares? Churches and Chapels are quite full enough; there is indeed a lack of breathing room. And in the Churches and Chapels what is there to be heard? In too many that oft reiterated phrase—"You may be able to do without religion now. You have no great sorrow. But think of the awful hour of death, etc.," and the poor, stricken, self-tormented soul shrinks into itself on hearing thus made into a bogy, to frighten children with, the one mysterious visitant whom it looks upon as the gentle friend, on whom it alone can depend with confidence that he will one day surely come,

though he tarries long, perchance, and says to itself—"It is not in death I long for God. It is in life I need Him. It is not death that terrifies me. It is life, with its terrible sense of responsibility, and that other terrible sense that it never can be lived over again."

Yet no one brings a glad message. And the one sinks into a more and more material existence, and the other thinks out some new and false solution of mystery and source of comfort. And the worst thing anyone can do is to ask an appointed teacher of religion, and be rebuffed, as seems inevitable, for then comes that almost irresistible temptation to judge of the doctrine by the appointed preacher, who perhaps himself has never heard it.

No one came near Margery, and she was not tempted to ask of anyone an explanation, as she led what seemed a thoroughly

objectless passing away of that precious treasure, Time.

There are people who can lead this life of compression and repression without danger, they shrivel naturally and gradually. You can see them doing so any day. Girls, who were handsome and had hearts and energies once, drying up into quasi-typical old maids on the back seats of carriages at any fashionable watering-place, or in the park too, for the matter of that, but especially at watering-places; men, who were good fellows once, and thought there was something in life, standing in the bow-windows of old established Clubs, ground down into machines now, that eat good dinners and sometimes tell a good story.

But Margery's was not a nature like these; she could not shrivel gradually and naturally. You can pen in the mountain torrent by building a wall of solid masonry

before it, but the torrent does not diminish its strength for all that, and when it eventually breaks over, and your wall falls to pieces like a broken egg-shell, then you are sorry you ever built it. At least, most men would be. You, of course, have your idiosyncrasies, and are not like other men. That typical man who is, has never been found yet. You may have a special fancy for building walls, just to see torrents leap over them. But the typical man, like other men, would say it was waste of labour, and only heightened the catastrophe it was intended to avert.

Margery had been tried by trials, and she had been tried by stagnation, and now the sun of prosperity was pouring its noonday rays upon her to see what it could effect. Everything around her was beautiful, and at her service; all the men ready to think themselves honoured by a smile

from her; he whom she thought the best man amongst them, absolutely idolizing her, and spending his days in adoration; none of the women apparently jealous or otherwise than friendly to her, with the exception of the little American heiress, who held herself aloof. All day long nothing to do of obligation, and half a dozen times a day every possible luxury in the way of eating and drinking. And Margery had not only known hunger, about which, as everyone imagines who has not tried it, there is a mingled flavour of heroism and romance; but she had lived as people are forced to live in third-rate London lodgings, when living alone and on £100 a-year, a quarter of which has been spent in advance. Try it, you bachelor *gourmand* of from forty to fifty. Rather starvation, I believe you say. And perhaps you are right. There is certainly

nothing romantic about a greasy mutton chop, and eating one's way through a leg of mutton that has appeared three times already can hardly be called a laughing matter. It is possible you could only starve to death on such a *régime*. But Margery was well acquainted with it, and at first the dinners at the Priory were a positive delight to her, not so much for the eating of them, after all, but for the look of them; the dinners, and the luncheons, and the breakfasts, all so perfect of their kind, and so tastefully arranged. For Una gave the finishing touch to the housekeeping department, and Una had ideas of her own on other subjects besides dressmaking. It was she who had directed that there should always be Badminton and iced coffee on Summer afternoons, with sometimes a slice of melon, or a pine-apple, though for weaker spirits there was

certainly hot tea and bread and butter in reserve.

All these flavoured at first of that Fairy-land where cakes hang on the trees, and even the hoar-frost is sugared. They were at first a positive delight to Margery. But all of a sudden they palled upon her, as luxury and regularity always in the end must pall upon the regular Bohemian. Those well-fed ladies and gentlemen who do such credit to the national *rosbif*, and at the same time do not despise made dishes, can perhaps hardly realise what a disgust their long, elaborate meals may arouse in those who have not by long custom been rendered callous. A banquet now and again may be very delightful, but a banquet every day, and two or three times a day, suggests rather the Elysium of the savage than the every-day life of progressive human beings. Margery had

once petitioned for a picnic almost in self-defence, but the footmen had gone, and the champagne too, and the galantine, and game pies, and hot-house fruits, all just the same as usual, only perhaps a trifle more abundant. The mere fact of the regularity of the hours weighed upon her spirits. That everyone should each night leave the drawing-room at eleven, that no one should ever appear in the breakfast-room before nine, that luncheon should always be on the table from two to three, and most people there all the while eating it! To many well-bred people this may all seem so much a matter of course as to need no comment, and to many poor hungry bodies a great matter for thankfulness. It had struck Margery in this light at first, but it had all palled upon her now. All this luxury was no matter of course to her, it was a thing that re-

quired explanation, and yet she was already weary of it. She was weary of wasting her days in idleness, she was weary of seeing other people waste theirs, she longed to see some one working, to be allowed to work herself. But she was never even able to practise for half an hour without an interruption, whilst as to reading, there was not a book upon the Priory tables, of which she did not feel that to read it would be idler, than not to do so. When Allan had first offered to her, he had seemed to feel something of the weariness she now felt, and he had asked her to give a purpose to his days, but she had never contemplated being herself the purpose for which he lived. And—the truth must out—she was very weary of her lover. Before Dalrymple Bruce appeared she was already very tired of him, and felt that, if there were only herself to

consider, she would far rather be a *prima donna*, or even a very secondary opera singer, to becoming the prospective Lady Stapleton. In one case she thought she knew what her life would be like; there would be long practisings, hard work, but work in which her heart delighted; there might possibly be applause, but that she felt as if she should despise. Managers might be disagreeable, and tenors impertinent, but to all that sort of thing she was already hardened, and there would at any rate be an appreciation of music. Her gift for singing would not be looked upon as an agreeable accomplishment, suitable to pass the time away for half an hour after dinner, to be taken up then like a photograph album, and as much neglected afterwards, when anything more to the purpose should turn up. There would be

men and women leading hard work-a-day lives, and fighting the battle of life—some bravely, some cowardly, but all fighting, not just doing nothing the whole day long, and falling in love for very idleness.

"I wonder how many times Allan had been in love before he met me," she said to herself one night. It was a thought that had crossed her mind before, but to which she had never voluntarily given entrance. There had been a time when she would have thought it treason to do so, but it was very indifferent to her now. "All these men are in love with some one —or fancy they are. It seems the fashion for them. I don't think it is for the girls. Una does not care for anyone; she talks of Randal Tollemache sometimes, but I don't believe she really cared for him. And Lottie—I don't understand Lottie; and

I—I'm tired of being in love, I think. It must be all the bad Travers blood. No Travers ever yet was contented, I believe. I've come across a good man, who cares for me, and who is rich, and well born, and has a beautiful place, and all his people, instead of being as angry as one might expect, are as kind to me as if I were not poor and a Travers. And so, as there is nothing wrong, I must needs make something wrong for myself, by not caring for Allan. Dear Allan! who is as good as gold, and deserves a wife ever so much better than I could ever be. It is not my fault, Allan. It is the bad Travers blood that will not let me care for you, just because I ought to. But I will, dear Allan! I will, only just now——"

And she threw a shawl over her evening dress, and slipped out by a little back door, by which she had of late often taken a

walk into the park, when everyone was supposed to be in bed, thus diversifying the monotony a little.

Those midnight rambles, taken by stealth, seemed to refresh and quiet her a little, under the fever induced by the life of elaborate idleness, which was so little suited to her robust, vigorous nature. It does not seem yet altogether certain that any human being was meant to lead quite such a life; but people with a weaker physique certainly seem to suffer less under it, though even the fragile little American, who had also been brought up to it, and never known another life, would perhaps have been less capricious under another *régime*, and in herself happier, even if not more capable of making others so.

Since Dalrymple Bruce's arrival, Margery's thoughts had, however, taken another turn, or rather she refused to think.

No midnight rambles in the park now, but a closing of the curtains and a quick laying down of her head upon the pillow with a determination not to think, not for a single instant. Yet if her Guardian Angel were near her then, he may have sighed to hear the one syllable "Dal!" breathed from her lips when sleep had relaxed her will, and Fancy alone held the rein of her thoughts. Poor Margery! she had read no Poems, no Romances; even if she had heard herself, she would hardly have known what this meant. But she was unconscious and dreaming. "Dal!" and her lips parted in a smile. She rarely smiled, when she talked with him.

CHAPTER XVI.

SWEET DAY! SO COOL, SO CALM, SO BRIGHT.

YET there were moments when Margery struggled, and tried with all her heart to be *good*. The first Sunday after Dalrymple's arrival was one of these occasions. The sweet church bells were sounding across the meadows, and they all walked down under the trees to church. It was one of those Sundays in very early Autumn when all Nature looks as if it were going to church too, the shadows rest so still and soft upon the cool, green grass, the very sunshine has a sort of calm about it, such as one never sees in Summer. If

even a cock crows, one feels surprised. Does not the cock know that it is Sunday?

They all walked very stilly to church, like good Christian people who had been leading good Christian lives all the week. Lord Talboys had been a little embarrassed by the want of a prayer-book, but Una had re-assured him by the promise of a red Morocco volume, left in permanence in a corner of the Priory square pew, and he was now carrying her little white and gold book ostentatiously for her, as if even its weight would be too much for her fairy fingers. Una held her head down, and looked very quiet and nun-like in a little grey dress, with a colourless, grave face. Lottie, on the other hand, recalled the text, "Oh, turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity!" She had on a new and very elaborate toilette from Paris, and for

once in her life seemed anxious about soiling or tearing it, giving herself a good deal of trouble to gather up its long folds, and asking once or twice if the others were quite sure it did not touch the ground. Harry Yorke was quite sure, he had walked twice round her to establish the fact, and finished by raising one refractory fold, and apparently intending to carry it all the way to church for her. On this Lottie laughed, and let down her dress altogether; the long train flowed on the grass behind her, and as the little king-cups and daisies raised their heads again, after she had brushed over them, the artist said it seemed as if she sowed them as she walked.

Lottie took no notice of the rather flowery speech, but Harry Yorke stooped and picked a daisy her skirts had brushed in passing, and pressed it to his lips, yet without anyone's seeming to notice it. He

then stuck it in his button-hole, and Lottie remarked upon it, and laughed at him about it. She was decidedly, to all outward seeming, the most frivolous of the party. As to Margery and Allan, they walked on in front, Margery with her head bent, and walking so fast that Allan had to quicken his pace to keep up with her. She looked very grave and very good, and both appeared so impressed by the solemnity of the church service in prospective that they did not speak a word all the way from the house to the church porch. There Margery paused, and asked where they were all to sit.

"You will have your corner, of course," said Allan. "If there isn't room for all the others, Una can send some of the men to sit in the nave. We may as well go in at once. I don't like standing about in the porch; it sets such a bad example. It is

too much of a gossiping place already."

Whenever Allan did not think anything quite right, he always said he did not like to do it because of setting a bad example. The idea that anything might be wrong in itself did not seem to have entered his head, or else he lacked the moral courage to enunciate it.

Lord Talboys had that unreasoning horror of going to church that seems to gain complete mastery over some men as they advance in life. The first Sunday, after he had arrived at the Priory, he had had letters to write, the next Sunday it had rained, but this day he had no valid excuse, and Una would not let him off. She knew quite well he ought to have offered to her long ago, and their engagement ought by this time to be a solemnly announced fact, and she knew he knew it too. What was the use of wasting a

month out of the yachting season on the empty pretence of having a few men to shoot partridges, about which nobody cared, if no offer came at all? There were plenty of other yachts to go sailing in, and besides, Lord Talboys' yacht ought to be ready by this time. He should be punished by being taken to church. He should go to church every Sunday till he did offer. In the meantime, let him carry her prayer-book, and welcome! She meant to accept him when he should offer. Only till then let the consciousness of his sins be brought home to him! And the little white face laughed inwardly as she felt his aversion growing stronger and stronger as he neared the church door, till she half expected he would bolt from the very porch. But, no! there he was, landed in the great square pew in possession of the red Morocco volume, and looking speci-

ally solemn over his hat. In spirit the little witch rubbed her hands as she pictured to herself his mental anguish, but she preserved a calmly devotional exterior, looking for all the world like a little white angel as she knelt bending over her prayer-book. And so Lord Talboys could not help thinking as he ventured once more to look up from his hat, and he felt he ought to have offered. He really ought! But just then his eye lighted upon Margery, sitting still in her corner, looking like no angel at all, but a woman of ripe, rich beauty, and his resolution faltered. After all, church was not such a bad place; you saw just the same people as at dinner, and better too, not having the epergnes between.

Lord Talboys began to feel more comfortable. Ah! there was the clergyman, and it was time for the service to begin,

and they must all stand up. Only that artist fellow seemed to have fallen asleep, Lord Talboys really must nudge him, if he did not stand up at once. It would look so bad for anyone to remain sitting, in the front pew, too, in sight of all the congregation.

Dalrymple awoke from his reverie, and stood up just in time to save Lord Talboys from the necessity of wakening him. He had been thinking of his last conversation with Margery, and of things longer ago than that, not of Church particularly, nor of anything connected with it, though he had covered his face like the others. But there now was the singing beginning, and of course Margery would sing. Dalrymple leant against the side of the pew, and half turned round to listen more comfortably. But, no! Margery was mute; she stood with her head bowed, and not a sound

came from her lips. A blank sense of disappointment stole over Dalrymple. Lottie's girlish treble was ringing in his ear, but he had counted on hearing Margery sing.

The Canticles were a failure, as far as he was concerned; they were no songs of praise for him. He was watching Margery. Why did she look so grave, and stand with her head so bowed? Why had she walked to Church so fast, and not spoken to him that morning?

"Are you ill, dearest?" asked Allan's voice, in an audible whisper.

Well, of course Stapleton had a right to ask that, and to whisper, if he chose; but Dalrymple started even more than Margery, who replied "No!" as if she were annoyed by being asked. So was Dalrymple annoyed too. Because a man was engaged to a girl, was that any reason

for whispering to her in Church? Could not he let her alone even then? And why, in the Heaven's name, should he think she was ill?

Dalrymple looked round again with a sudden hope that perhaps it was that, after all, that was making her look so grave. But, no! Margery did not look ill, only wretched. Dalrymple was wretched also. He began to feel where he was, in an English country Church, with a choir partly composed of schoolgirls, quavering and repeating the syllables over and over again, as he had so often heard them in his boyish days. He thought of his mother, by whose side he had been wont to stand, when last he had heard such quavering; then of his old uncle. He supposed they were now standing, side by side, in the Church at home.

Home, indeed! Had they repented, he

wondered, that they had cast him out, wished that they had treated him with greater mildness. Did they even yet wish that he might return? Dalrymple twisted his limp prayer-book out of all resemblance to one, his eyes were smarting so, that he only wished that he could get away and hide himself. Oh! that he were a boy again once more, and all his life since then a dream! How happy he would be to wake up and find himself in his old place once more, with his character yet undeveloped, his life's capabilities yet uncircumscribed! Oh, God! that it could be!

Then came the Litany. It was decidedly a relief to Lord Talboys that all the men did not kneel; of course he must have, if the others had, but he had not relished the prospect at all, and really it was so long since he had been at Church, he had not known what the fashion might be. Of

course the ladies knelt. Delicate little creatures! he wondered how they supported the fatigue, but he supposed they were more supple in their joints, and besides it looked well, it certainly looked very well, he liked to see them kneeling, but he was glad the men did not. Yes, that was all right—Sir James was standing half leaning over into the next pew; Allan was sitting, though in such a cramped, bent double position, that he looked as if he would decidedly have been more comfortable upon his knees; as to Harry Yorke, he was leaning back quite at his ease, intoning the Litany very nicely. It seemed you might do quite as you liked. Only Dalrymple was kneeling, probably he had got an uncomfortable seat, yes, he certainly did seem to have got an uncomfortable place.

But Dalrymple was kneeling for no reason of that kind, but only because he

was *so* wretched. He would have liked to abase himself still lower, if he could, he would have thrown ashes upon his head if he had had any to throw; nothing could have seemed too great an expression of sorrow to him just then. For he could feel without being told, that something was very wrong with Margery, and he feared—he hoped—no, he feared, that he himself was the cause. He had been a bad friend to her, a cruel lover; he had spoilt her life for her, and all for no good to himself, for no good to anyone. He could hear Margery's voice now, low but passionate in its wail of supplication—"Have mercy upon us miserable sinners."

Margery could join in the prayer for mercy that day; she could not praise, nor pray for anything but that, but it seemed to ease her to confess herself a miserable sinner. She had forgotten all about being

respectable, and, like other people, she was kneeling, as women kneel in Italy, praying alone with fervour in the midst of an unheeding crowd. Her hands were clasped, her eyes were raised to heaven, tears were trembling on the long lashes. She was praying with such self-abandonment that her earnestness affected them all. Lord Talboys stared at her with round eyes, and felt that Church was, after all, as terrible a place as he had imagined; while Allan buried his face in his hands, and called to mind his youthful peccadilloes, the apples he had stolen in his school-days, the fag he had licked unjustly, the debts he had contracted so carelessly, and that would even now be such a serious drawback to his living comfortably with Margery, and he almost groaned out the "miserable sinners." What else was he? Very happy in Margery, certainly, who was so far

beyond the deserts of any man, but otherwise a miserable sinner. Nothing else at all. Even Lottie joined more earnestly in the common prayer, as she heard Margery's sorrowful tones, but Dalrymple was by far the most miserable. He was the sort of man to be suddenly converted, if only anyone had set about it, though whether his conversion just then would be likely to be lasting is another matter. But, as it was, no one had tried to convert him. He had been brought up in as strictly religious a household as it would well be easy to find; his mother trying to atone for her weakness, in her own eyes, in having fallen in love with his father, captivated by his very faults, by the strictness with which she brought up her so early fatherless boy, and his tender-hearted uncle never daring to interfere between his widowed sister and her boy. Dalrymple had be-

lieved implicitly from his early childhood in his mother's love for himself, thought that it was something like his love for her, that led him to go to Church, and look serious on a Sunday, and do and not do many other things just to please her. And when he had quite made up his mind that the one thing that would please himself would be becoming an artist, he had told her his wish with a frank confidence that she, in consideration of the intensity of his wish, would put her own views for him on one side. But he had been told coldly and sternly that the life of an artist was unworthy both of a gentleman and of a Christian, and that those who took to such a life bade adieu for ever to respectability and virtue. He might have yielded to entreaties even then, but such language as this only maddened the high-strung sensitive boy. He was hardly more than a boy

then, and in some things very youthful for his age, partly owing to his bringing up, partly to his native temperament.

So, without one word of counsel, he had gone out into the world to study from models, in company with other fellow-students, and cut off from all old friends. Perhaps the only wonder was that his character had not suffered more in consequence. What had saved him from sinking further? Was it only want of temptation? Or was there, after all, somewhere in the man a code of principles which he had sucked in with his mother's milk, and could not even yet transgress without violating his own nature?

Anyhow, the service had somewhat powerfully affected the party from the Priory. Then followed the sermon. It lasted half an hour, and was a rather ponderous and formal denunciation of the

sin of drunkenness. Once the clergyman made a slip of the tongue, and Harry Yorke immediately went off into a fit of laughter, not that there was anything to laugh at, but simply from revulsion of feeling, and relief at something to vary the tedium of that half hour's enforced sitting still with a serious face, being himself not any more addicted to a sedentary life than he was to drinking. But Miss Spluck looked so much shocked at his laughter that the young man nearly bit his lip off for vexation, and then sat with his handkerchief up to his face, alternately nursing his lip, and choking with suppressed laughter for the remainder of the sermon, which at last happily came to an end. He certainly was very glad of the blessing. So was Lord Talboys, who felt as if he had conducted himself with strict propriety, and richly deserved it. All the rest of the day

there was something guarded about his conversation, as if he had a character to keep up. Going to Church had decidedly had a good effect upon him.

When they came through the Church Porch into the outer world again, there was just the same still look about it all as when they had left it. The shadows were yet as soft, the sunshine as calm, and the cows as placid.

"I like to see the cows on a day like this," said Miss Spluck, looking up with eyes which had not yet relapsed from their spiritual communings into an every-day expression, and addressing at haphazard her nearest neighbour, who chanced just then to be the artist.

"Yes," said Dalrymple, shortly. He had his hands behind his back, his head bent, and his soft felt hat well pressed down over his eyes, altogether a most unconven-

tional Church-goer. "I don't care much for cows on other days, but, as you say, they seem part of it on Sunday."

His face looked rather haggard and drawn, but Miss Spluck was not sufficiently interested in him to observe it; she was indeed pre-occupied just then.

"Harry Yorke! I want to speak to you," she said, and the artist took it as his dismissal, and wandered away, while Yorke came up, rather afraid that he was going to be lectured upon laughing in Church, and blushing accordingly, with a great many excuses on the tip of his tongue, which, however, were not wanted. The conversation was to take an unexpected turn.

Meanwhile, Margery had waited for Allan in the porch, and passed her arm through his, and walked away with him quite apart from all the others.

"It is all so peaceful and still," she said, in that soft, low voice in which some people always speak on leaving Church, as if still afraid of disturbing their own, or others' devotions.

"Like life," said Allan, in the same subdued tone. "I often think my life has been cast in very pleasant places. There has been no great trouble or grief in it, and now it promises fairer than ever before. God has been very good to me."

Margery looked up startled.

"Allan!" she said, speaking in a sharp, constrained tone.

"Yes, dearest," said he, gazing into her face with that tender, grave air she knew so well.

"Let us sit down here on this stile, and talk," she said. "I like the view from here better than from anywhere. The Priory looks so well just jutting out be-

hind the trees, and from here one gets a glimpse of the Church too, and I am so fond of that wild bit of fern and heath to our left."

"Are you, dearest? I have always thought it rather a discredit. But, since you like it, I shall not urge my father any more to set it in order. What were you going to ask me, though?"

"Oh, nothing," said Margery. She was leaning her head on her hand, and looking away at the wild piece of land of which she had said she was fond. She was sitting on the lowest step of the stile, on the bar placed as a step. Allan was leaning against the top of the stile. He took hold of her hand in both his now, as if to draw it away from her face, and see what she was thinking of. She let him have her hand, and looked round at him. "Tell me, Allan, do you think life was given us only just that

we should pass it in pleasant places?"

"Certainly not, dearest. When my father engages a servant, it isn't just that he may enjoy the Priory. He has work that he wants him to do. Only if the servant finds it pleasant, it is so much the better for him."

Margery smiled at this homely illustration. "But what work is there for us to do—you and me?"

Allan grew grave, and thought a little.

"Some people say we ought to do everything for the poor, and spend our lives helping them," continued Margery. She was quoting from a book she had read now. She had never known anyone who held anything the least resembling this opinion.

"I think people make far too much fuss about the poor now-a-days," said Allan. "My father is a very kind landlord, and

some of the men are horrid poachers, and you'd be surprised, Margery, at the sums that the poor, as you call them, spend at the public-house. That was quite true that sermon to-day, and very much called for, I should say. They don't pay their rent always, but you see all the publics thrive."

Margery was silent, Allan had strayed so far away from her line of thought. She did not care to hear a diatribe upon the sins of the poor, no doubt they were very wicked, much like the rich. But what she wanted to know was what the rich were to do, only she knew it was of no use to try to pursue the question with Allan, he would never understand her, and it would only bore him.

"Do you mind coming round to look at the horses?" he asked now. "There's something the matter with the chestnut, the groom does not quite know what."

Margery rose with alacrity, and passed her arm through his. She was determined to be very good to-day, very loving, very ready to do anything he wished. Allan was emboldened by her manner to say,

"Margery, I have been wishing to tell you that my father has quite consented to let me have Redlands, and farm the land about it. I am not good for much, but I've always had a liking for farming, which is fortunate, as it seems the thing most likely to be of use to me now. I hope I shall make something of it. Anyhow we may be very comfortable there. Redlands is a nice old-fashioned house, not at all like an ordinary farm. And so you see, dearest, since my father has consented, there is nothing wanting now but for you to fix the day for—our wedding." Allan spoke the words very softly, and with his right hand pressed the hand that was resting on

his other arm, while he looked down into her face.

But Margery stood quite still; she grew quite stiff and cold all over as, with dilated eyes, she seemed to see the future she was preparing for herself spread out before her. Redlands! She knew it. An old-fashioned house; she was not sure about the niceness. It stood rather in a hollow, with a quaint old yew-hedge between it and the road. Nevertheless, as one passed by the gate one could look in, and see the two deep bay-windows, one on each side of the door. Those two bay-windows were evidently places in which to sit; the remainder of the two rooms would be dark, she thought, and she could fancy how in the darkest corner her piano would stand. Allan would like a song in the evenings, when he came home tired from his farming, and

then she would sing to him, and he would fall asleep, and when she was quite sure of it she could fancy how she would leave off, and go to the window and draw aside the curtains, and sit down on the window seat, and look out, and *think*. She could not fancy that anyone who cared for music would ever come to Redlands—anyone who cared for anything for which she cared. Dalrymple, of course, would never come, he would go back to Italy and paint. And would Allan ever realise that she was not quite happy, that with enough to eat and a roof over her head all her earthly wants were not yet supplied? She could fancy how unsatisfied longings would leave their print upon her face, as she had seen them do upon those of other women. Would Allan ever notice it? Would it distress him? Or would he be able to be happy beside her quite miserable? Would such a life

as she pictured to herself, of continual feigning and concealment, be even right? How would he feel if, after years of it, he found out what his married life had really been? Would he not have the right to reproach her then, and say that he would rather have had the simplest village girl to be his wife than her, whose heart, and soul, and mind were all so apart from his?

"Allan," said she, and her voice trembled, "are you quite satisfied with me for a wife? Do you think really I shall make you happy?"

"My dearest, how can you doubt it? The question is much more, if I can make you happy. I know it seems so inappropriate for you to be a farmer's wife, but if I could think of anything better I'd do it directly. If there were anything you thought you'd like better. Only that seems the natural thing to do, one of the duties

of life you were talking of just now," he added, with a smile. "I don't quite see how we could afford to live in town, but I'd try it if——"

"Allan! as if that would make any difference," interrupted Margery, impetuously. "Dear Allan, you do not understand me. You are so much too good—*too* kind. I do not deserve it, Allan," and her voice faltered. She was thinking how delightful she had once thought it would be to do little things for him, knowing he would be the better pleased with them because she did them. At Redlands there might be many little things to do for him. "I should like to do things for him," thought Margery. "I would gladly do anything for him, only—not be his wife. But I suppose other women have married men they did not love so passionately, and they have lived through it. I suppose I can

too. At all events, I have got to try. I dare not draw back now. It is too late. It would be worse than not paying a debt. I gave up my liberty before I ever came here. Only somehow I did not think of it then. I believe I always thought Sir James would refuse his consent, and that it would be prevented somehow. But I have got to be his wife now. I have got to be his wife!"

And thus thinking, it was almost less difficult to persuade Margery to fix a day for their wedding than it might have been with many a girl, who yet would have regarded the breaking off of her engagement as the end-all of life's happiness. She was already fearful lest Allan should suspect how she was feeling, and she accepted the day that he at last proposed very quietly. She had no more objection to it than any other. But the sunshine that

had seemed so still and beautiful to her before, was to her now a deception, there was no warmth in it, it was but sunshine to the eye. "Like what our home will be," thought Margery. Then she consoled herself by thinking that perhaps, after all, most women felt as she did. It was a very serious step to take that of marrying, and very likely she only shrank from the idea of it now, because she felt afraid, and most women did the same, if she only knew. "I daresay it is nothing but that," thought Margery. "I certainly do not dislike Allan."

Half an hour afterwards they were at the stables, and there found one or two of the others, among them Dalrymple. He had sauntered down there by himself, after he had received his dismissal from Miss Spluck. Una had taken Lord Talboys there, as a sort of reward for going to Church. She

was moving about among the grooms and horses rather knowingly, almost as much in her element as on board a yacht.

"When I see a woman in a stable, I always feel towards her much as if she had put on man's clothing," said Dalrymple, morosely. He was leaning against the stable-door, with his arms folded, his hat at the back of his head now. As an artist, he did not wear a chimney-pot even on Sundays.

Margery, who was about to enter, grew red, and paused upon the threshold. When Allan led the chestnut up to her, she had only just courage to pat it gently.

"You must learn to take an interest in horses and cows, if you are to be a farmer's wife, Margery," said Allan, cheerily.

"A farmer's wife!" said Dalrymple, almost under his breath, but scanning her from head to foot. "He will be offering

to sing tenor in 'Don Giovanni' next. It would be just as possible."

Margery said nothing, but she drew herself up, looking proud and defiant. Allan had heard nothing, as he led the horse away again, but Lord Talboys laughed. "Love works wonders," he said, "and for his sake, Stapleton knows that Miss Travers will soon take an interest in fatted swine."

Dalrymple was stooping, kicking a pebble away with his foot, and when he looked up, his eyes were full of tears. Margery's met his, somehow they often did, when he looked at her. He had those powerful eyes that mostly attract the eyes of those they look at. They attracted hers.

"Forgive me, Madge," he said, in an undertone, as he walked away from the stable-door, and yet paused to wring rather

than press her hand in passing. "Only it seems so preposterous, and I—I've got a headache."

"A headache, Dal!" She followed him the few steps, two perhaps, that he had taken away from her. "I am so sorry. But please don't say anything of that kind again. Please never do. It *is* difficult for me, and it *is* my duty."

"Your duty! My God!" cried Dalrymple, turning and looking at her with that glow of enthusiasm upon his face that had been so striking the first evening of his arrival.

Again she met his eyes. That language of the eyes is understood by everyone, it needs no translation into one language from the other, neither, as Emerson says, do the eyes need any introduction before they speak, being in this unlike Englishmen. But it is difficult ever to say exactly

what they express, only Margery and Dalrymple could not have said so much to each other in an hour or two as their eyes said in that momentary meeting. Then Margery looked away again, and Dalrymple pressed his hat down over his eyes, and said, in the tone of a man who is worn out, and has no hope any more,

"If it is your duty, you must do it, and God forbid that I should ever say anything to make it difficult to you again."

Then Allan joined them, and told Margery what he thought was the matter with the chestnut, and that he hoped it would be quite fit for her to ride next day.

"But I cannot ride to-morrow," said Margery. "I have promised to give Mr. Bruce another sitting then. You know you agreed it was to be to-morrow, Allan?"

"Yes, certainly—certainly," said Allan.

"How is it getting on? When are we to see it, Bruce?" he asked, friendlily.

He was so unsuspicious of anything being possibly wrong, he trusted Margery so implicitly. There had been times when she had raged against him inwardly for not being more on his guard, and taking more care of her. At others she recognised that this was her only safeguard. If he had laid restrictions upon her she would have defied him, and all might have been at an end long ago. But, as it was, he trusted her, and she was bound to him. Many prisoners have found their parole weigh heavier than any chains; but in the former case there may come a time when the man considers whether his parole is binding, and argues about it, displaying a subtlety then, such as almost to convince his hearers. After a little such arguing

the parole commonly weighs feather-light, no amount of logic works such an effect upon the chains.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARRY YORKE.

ALL this time it may be remembered that Lottie Spluck had walked off with Harry Yorke through the pretty field flowers, that bowed their heads once more as her flounces brushed over them, and under the branches of the great stately beech-tree avenue.

The centre of the avenue was a drive, but on either side was a grass-grown foot-path, and there Lottie chose to walk. It was about the longest way she could have taken home from Church, but then, as she had told Yorke, she wanted to talk to him.

However, she seemed in no hurry to begin now, as she walked on with her sweet face bowed, the sunlight glinting through the trees on to her long soft curls, falling in a shower on her shoulders. It was the fashion that year, and suited Lottie exactly. Lottie had all the appearance of being on her way home from Church, as she walked along in the sun and shadow. She was fond of going to Church, going always twice on the Sundays, and on week days also, when there was a service. She said sometimes that it kept her out of mischief, but I think there was more in it than that. For all her frivolity and spoilt child ways, there was more in the little American heiress than met the eye, as I think this story will show. At last she looked round over her shoulder.

"Harry," said she, her face looking irresistibly saucy with its delicate colour,

bright hair, and wide open blue eyes, but her voice soft and girlish, perhaps even a trifle tender. "Do you recollect our compact?"

"Perfectly," said Yorke, pulling up short, and very much taken by surprise. He was not a good-looking young man, but he was very well in his way, tall enough, and a gentleman every inch of him, well drilled also. He had got on a tall black hat, and his Sunday coat, and looked quite the representative Guardsman, who had been to church. But he grew a little red now, as he came up abreast of Miss Spluck.

"I am glad to hear it," said Lottie. "Do you know, Harry—I thought—I thought you were getting to care for me. Very stupid of me, wasn't it?" and she laughed.

Yorke laughed too, but there was uncommonly little merriment in his laugh.

"Ha! ha!" he said, but he did not look comfortable about it.

"Come now, Harry, don't make a fool of yourself. Go away to-morrow," and she actually laid her hand on his arm. In America, of course, they have a different code, but I am not for one moment going to represent Miss Spluck as a typical American; she had a character of her own. Most Americans have.

"I may have made a fool of myself a hundred times before now," said Yorke, growing redder than ever, and looking almost indignantly at the little detaining hand that was doing him the honour of virtually collaring him, or button-holing him, however you like to put it. "But I don't know what you mean, Miss Spluck, by advising me to go away to-morrow. I've never made love to you for a single moment, nor thought of it, if that's what

you mean by referring to our compact."

"I know you haven't," said Lottie, leaving go of his arm now, and beginning to tangle the grass with her parasol. "And I know you'd think yourself dishonoured for ever by saying a single word of the kind to me, because you have got *debts*." The withering contempt with which Miss Spluck spoke of such a trifle as debts, would have amused anyone cool enough to be amused. But Yorke was not amused at all, he started as if he had been stung. "Only you know when one goes to church and all that, one sees the reality of things, and it is that daisy did it. That made me see what I've been blind not to see long ago, I daresay, only you see I wasn't thinking of you, I suppose. But I am now, and though you mayn't have said a word to me, I know, just as well as though you had, that you do care for me a little—

just the least bit in the world. And so, before it gets any worse, I want you to go away, for I can't—indeed I never can be Mrs. Harry."

She was laughing at the end, but there were tears in her eyes. She had been very grave at first, and Yorke had been very grave too. However, he coloured up now.

"I never asked you, Miss Spluck."

"No, but you see I'm a Yankee, and go-ahead, and all that, and I take the offer for granted—because I know you'd never make it—not if you died for me. So I take it all for granted, and I refuse you at once. Poor Harry!" and she laid her hand once more caressingly on his arm.

Yorke did not look indignantly at it this time; there was a sort of mist before his eyes as he stared at the grass and the flowers.

"You'll get over it some day," said

Lottie, buoyantly, looking at him very kindly, though, the while. "Only promise me you'll go away to-morrow, and forget all about me, and not make a fool of yourself."

"It is too late for that, I am afraid."

"There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," said Lottie, lightly. "You'll find many a nicer girl than I."

"No, that I never shall," cried Yorke, passionately, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips.

"Come—come. None of that, if you please," said Lottie, imperiously. "Remember our compact. I did not ask you to walk round by the beech-tree avenue with me that you might make love to me, but to tell you that you never must. For it would be no use, Mr. Yorke, no use at all, though I daresay I might have cared for you, if I had known you first, but now

I never shall. So now you know all about it, Harry, for though I don't care for you in that way, I tell you to your face, there's not another young fellow in the world I put such trust in, or like better as a friend."

Harry Yorke looked at her. "You said if you had known me first then——"

"Hush!" said Lottie, impetuously. "No more about that now. I don't know why I said so much to you. I wish I could pay your debts for you, Mr. Yorke," she added, hurriedly. "That's a much more serious matter than whether I care for you or not—a little bit of a girl, not worth much one way or the other."

"You seem very anxious to remind me of my debts, Miss Spluck," said Yorke, bitterly. "It is true, the only time I forget them is when I am with you. Then I forget them —*and* your fortune," he added.

"Don't waste words upon that, I advise you," said Lottie, defiantly. "When was there ever an heiress unwilling to believe she was loved for herself, not for her money? Only I wish you'd borrow some of it, don't you see! Why shouldn't I lend it to you, as well as the Jews?"

"Miss Spluck, do you wish to insult me?" cried Yorke, starting back, and looking at her in amazement. "Sooner than take a penny of your money, don't you know that I'd shoot myself, that any gentleman would? How dare you! Because you know I'm down, you think you may trample upon me. And as if it matters what becomes of me now! I'll go abroad and send in my papers, and there will be an end of Harry Yorke, as far as the world is concerned, or you either. I'll never trouble you more. I did not know I had troubled you; but since it seems to bore you having me *hang-*

ing around, as you call it, I believe, why I'll go away to-morrow—to-night, if you will. And now I wish you good morning!" and he raised his hat, and was about to pass away from her down the avenue again.

They were in front of the house now, in full view of ever so many mullioned and gabled windows that might or might not be full of eyes, but Lottie disregarded them all. With one swift bound she was by Yorke's side, exclaiming,

"Mr. Yorke, I'll never let you go away to-morrow, or any day, unless you say you don't part in anger from me. We've been such good friends, and I'd give anything to keep you as a friend, for God knows I haven't many. But it was to save you pain I spoke. Come, Mr. Yorke, this is not generous," she cried, with her eyes sparkling. She was a pretty girl at all times, but she looked fairly lovely now in

the excitement of the moment, her bonnet falling off, and her eyes shining. "You know it was only to save you pain I spoke, and it is not every girl would have done as much."

"Not another girl but yourself," said Yorke, seizing the hand she held out to him. But he was very white as he added, quickly, "Only as it does you no harm, and it can't make matters worse for me, let me stay here a little longer. Why send me away at once?"

"It is better, Harry. It is better." There was an earnest expression in Miss Spluck's face, such as some of her best friends would not have credited her with. "And now that I have spoken to you as I have, I *can't* consent that you should stay. Of course you're free to stay if you like; but if you care about pleasing me, you'll go, Harry."

"I'll go," said Yorke, crumpling up her hand in his. "And God bless you and keep you from pain, Miss Spluck. If you ever want a friend, you'll know where to find one, and you'd ask a service of me just the same as if—as if this had never been," he asked.

"Anything you can do for me, I shall count upon your doing," said Lottie. "I shall always look upon myself as your friend, with all a friend's rights. And when you can look upon me in the same way, then let us meet again. Now good-bye, Mr Yorke. I shall see you again, perhaps. But let this be our leave-taking."

"Good-bye," said Yorke, and marched away down the beech-tree avenue, and was one of those missing at luncheon.

Lottie was missing also. When she went into the house, she lay down on her bed and had a good cry over poor Yorke.

Girls are sometimes very compassionate over the men they refuse, and Lottie really liked him; besides she felt so alone in the world, this little heiress. She had not a friend in the world, and there was no one whose duty it seemed to be to take thought for her.

Yorke did not appear again till he sauntered into the smoking-room in the evening, before dinner. Some of the ladies had gone to Church again, and some of the men had gone to smoke, among the number Dalrymple and Lord Talboys. The other men did not get on particularly well with Dalrymple. It was not entirely that they thought him conceited, as one or two little things, Lord Talboys' desire to punch his head the first evening, etc., may have led the reader to suppose, but they felt that they had nothing in common with him. Stapleton had become tiresome enough since his

engagement. "Such a capital fellow as he was before!" the other men said, regretfully; but now they almost doubted his ever riding to cover again, and as to getting him out shooting, that for a long time past had been more trouble than it was worth; and though marriage is generally the most efficacious cure to spooning, they almost doubted it in his case. But Dalrymple not only neither hunted nor shot, but treated both these topics with a sort of silent disdain. The other men declared he was too Bohemian for them. Lord Talboys was the one he got on best with. They talked together about art and pictures, and sometimes told amusing tales of continental society, Lord Talboys' generally a little scandalous. But there again it did not do. For one day Dalrymple started up with,

"Oh, as for her! You must consider

her circumstances. What could she do better, as she was placed?"

"Why, at that rate, you might make excuses for everyone," said one of the other men.

"Perhaps it would be better if one did," said Dalrymple, musingly.

The other men voted that a decidedly Bohemian sentiment, and dangerous. They rather held aloof from Dalrymple, but they were all very courteous to him, because though the Bruces were a good family, and the Dalrymples good also, yet of course it was a notorious fact that he was not staying in the house as a friend, but simply to paint Miss Spluck's portrait, taking Miss Travers by the way. So they were all very civil to him always. Dalrymple appreciated it perfectly.

Only Harry Yorke and he were old school friends; so though they were as dissimilar

as possible—Yorke being a man generally liked in his regiment, by which I mean that he was a good-humoured, easy-going fellow, without any particular tastes or opinions, the having of which might have endeared him to a few, but could not have failed to estrange him from some others—yet there was a sort of friendliness between him and the artist, such as did not exist between Dalrymple and any of the others. And they liked each other well enough, though Yorke's only specialities were being a straight rider, and a good shot, both of which acquirements Dalrymple certainly did not possess, and affected to despise.

"I say, Bruce," said Yorke, "it is very stuffy in there, come and smoke on the terrace outside." The twilight was coming on already, and in the half light Dalrymple did not notice how pale the other looked. Besides, he was himself pre-occupied. He

hardly noticed the roses hanging their heads heavy with dew, and generally Dalrymple was very observant of his surroundings. The thermometer of his spirits went up perceptibly, when there was an effect to be admired. "I say, when you've finished your picture, you won't have any need of that first sketch you made out in the garden," continued Harry Yorke.

"What! of Miss Spluck? I generally keep my sketches. They often come in handy."

"Do they really?" said Yorke, his face falling. "Do you know, I was going to ask you if you'd let me have it."

"Were you really?" said the artist, a little absently, knocking the dew off one of the roses with his stick as he spoke. "So you are going in for the money-bags in good earnest, are you? Well, make haste about it, that girl won't last long.

Whoever marries her will soon be a widower."

"What do you mean?" cried Yorke, seizing his arm.

"I say, you hurt," replied Dalrymple, releasing his arm. "Have you never noticed the way she fetches her breath? I noticed it the first day she sat to me. And then her hands too, they're cold enough in the morning, but they're burning at night. I can feel it through her gloves. Why, it is as plain as a pike-staff to anyone who has got eyes. I've seen many a pretty girl come to Italy for the Winter, but I never saw one come away, who looked as she does. What did her father and mother die of? They must have died off pretty sharp. Consumption, I tell you, and so will this girl——Why, Yorke, what's the matter?"

Yorke had thrown himself on to a gar-

den-seat, and was covering his face with his hands, while he shook with sobs.

"Oh, Lottie! Lottie!" he cried. "And I can do nothing for you! My darling, and you said you'd got no friends!"

"My dear fellow, forgive me. I'd no idea—— Why, what a fool I've been!" cried the artist, striking his forehead in despair. "I daresay it is not so bad with her. Very likely she'll get over it, if she's taken care of. So many girls do. I wish I'd bitten my tongue out before I said what I did. But there has been so much chaffing between you about her money, I never thought you really cared——" Dalrymple's voice trembled. For one moment he realised what the world would be to him, if Margery were dying, and he felt so sure how it was with Lottie, though, like a false friend, he was ready to swear black was white now.

"Cared!" groaned Yorke. "There's not another girl in London like her. So natural, so spirited, such a thorough woman, and yet no nonsense about her, no humbug! Talk about her money, indeed. The man would be a happy fellow who got her if she wasn't worth a farthing."

"And you can't be that man?" said the artist, meditatively.

"I!" and Yorke groaned. There was no use trying to console him; Dalrymple did not attempt it.

After dinner Yorke retired into the library, and Allan, who went to see what he was doing there, reported that he found him in despair because he could not see any up train till midday next day.

"But he'd got the Continental Bradshaw, and was looking at it topsy-turvy, so I tried to explain to him that might be the reason. I am very sorry he has to

leave us, but I'm afraid he has got some unpleasant letters. They say he'll have to sell out. It is a great pity he ever took to horse-racing. On £300 a-year a man has no business to do anything of that kind. And now I cannot imagine what will become of him. That sort of man is done for when he leaves the Army."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Lottie, to whom this rather pitiful account was addressed.

"No, nothing, I fancy. None of his relations will help him, and he is given over to the Jews. I only wonder they've let him stay here so long. Unless it is the glamour of your name, Miss Spluck. A smile from you was always said, last season, to impart a certain charm to a man in the eyes of his creditors."

"That is the reason you came about me so much, I suppose," said Lottie, and pouted a little.

Allan bent over her laughingly. "Do you think so?" he asked.

Lottie had trodden on Margery's dress a few minutes before, she had apologised for it very much, but Margery had, notwithstanding, had to go upstairs to have it mended. So Allan and Lottie sat alone together, with Yorke in the room hard by studying Bradshaw. Dalrymple was turning over a volume of engravings with Lady Mary Redmayne. Every now and then he glanced up and looked at Lottie and Allan.

"Poor Yorke!" he said. "Poor Yorke!" Once it occurred to him to say "Poor Margery!" and then he laughed aloud.

"What was that—what was that? I did not hear what you were saying," said Lady Mary.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A QUIET GAME OF SPELLICANS.

MARGERY'S dress had been set to rights, and she had descended to the drawing-room again. It was Sunday night, and consequently not very animated. Lord Talboys and Una, however, were playing spellicans. Spellicans are such an innocent game, they may be played any night of the week. Margery stood still and watched them. Lord Talboys' hand shook a good deal, Una's was as firm and steady as hand could be. She carried off the spellicans one after the other. Each time she won one Lord Talboys laid a

five pound note on the table, which Una appropriated. It did not seem a very amusing game, but it seemed to amuse Lord Talboys.

"Poor little thing! her head aches, so I am trying to amuse her," said he, looking up at Margery with his wicked old eyes. "Too much church-going and unpleasant letters into the bargain! Everyone seems to have unpleasant letters today. There's Mr. Yorke has to go away, and Miss Stapleton has a headache. There, my little dear, are you satisfied?" and he laid down another note.

Una counted them.

"Yes, that will do," she said, bending her little white face forward, so that it was hardly to be wondered at that Lord Talboys said,

"Don't put your face so near me, or I shan't resist the temptation. I tell you I

shan't. So now you're forewarned. Run away and write your letters now, and Miss Travers and I will finish the spellicans. You play spellicans, of course, Miss Travers?"

"Not for money," said Margery, coolly.

"But I always lose," said Lord Talboys.

"So I see."

Lord Talboys and Una exchanged glances.

"Happy girl!" said Una, softly sighing, and passing her arm round her.

"Well, we needn't play for money unless you like," said Lord Talboys, at the same time making a little sign to Una to leave them. He had just given her £100, so she felt somewhat in his power, and bound to obey him. She went away, and left Margery. "Come," said Lord Talboys, "a little stake adds piquancy, and you'll be wanting a new dress one of these

days. Let us play for £20. A lady *can* get a dress for £20, can't she?"

"Yes, I should think so," said Margery. She was not paying much attention. There, at the end of the long drawing-room, she saw Dalrymple and Lottie talking together very earnestly. She could not see Lottie's face, but she could see Dalrymple's, and it looked agitated. So he was going in for money after all, though he had professed himself so much above it. Of course he had only come to the Priory to paint Lottie's picture, yet she had never seen them in such close converse before that night. He had seemed rather to avoid her at first, but of course that was strategy. There! Lottie was moving away indignantly. Was he really offering then and there? At any rate, he seemed to have said something to propitiate her. Lottie had come nearer again,

and was looking quite lovingly at him. How Margery hated her! she had never hated her before, but she hated her now. She felt sure that Lottie had trodden on her dress intentionally, that she might have to go upstairs, and that she herself might have a long, quiet talk with Dalrymple. It was not much of the time that Margery had been away that Lottie had wasted with the artist, but now Allan had gone off to see after Yorke, and Lottie had moved across to talk to Dalrymple. Margery's hand shook almost more than Lord Talboys. "Am I to give you £20 if I lose? I don't think I can," said she, harshly.

"What, a lady lose! Take money from a lady!" cried Lord Talboys. "No, indeed! A rosebud from your bosom, a violet that you have touched. But, you will see, you won't lose."

However, he had great difficulty in enab-

ling Margery to win, and the game took time. Each time Margery shook, Lord Talboys shook too, but his whole effort was to shake the spellicans, so that she must take one the next time. Sometimes she failed in the most remarkable manner. However, at last she had won, and Lord Talboys handed her two rustling notes.

"Violet silk would suit you," he said. "No, violet velvet. You'll write for it at once, won't you? Una will tell you a good address." He generally spoke of her as Miss Stapleton. "Now I shall have the pleasure of seeing a very pretty sight, and all through the other pleasure of losing a game of spellicans to you. But what am I thinking of? Twenty pounds won't get a violet velvet."

"Yes, they will," said Margery, haughtily; she felt that she was lowering herself in her own eyes and in his by taking the

money, and yet some demon in her made her like to do it that night. However, she did not want any more.

"My dear, I don't believe you ever bought a violet velvet before. Now I have. It is a very favourite dress of mine, and I shall like to see you wear it."

"I don't know who gave you the right to call me my dear, Lord Talboys."

"My dear Lord Talboys! How pretty it sounds from your lips!" said he, chuckling. "But you're quite right, I haven't got it. There's another twenty in part payment. Now I'm cleaned out, I think, quite cleaned out. Really, you ladies, you ladies! one might as well fall among Jews. Put it in your pocket quickly," he added. "There is Stapleton coming, and there'd be the devil of a row. I'll tell about Una, I swear I will, if you breathe a word. There, that's right," as he saw Margery

slip the notes into her pocket. "Miss Travers and I have been having a quiet game of spellicans, Stapleton. I advise you to try it. A nice quiet Sunday amusement, very quiet and very suitable for Sunday," and unseen by Allan he winked at Margery.

Margery did not care. What did she care about anything that night? Was not Allan her affianced lover? Had she not that very morning fixed their wedding day at his request? And was not Dalrymple pressing Lottie's hand at that very moment? Low though he was speaking, she could hear him say, "Then you trust me completely?" And Lottie was answering "Yes." In such a world as this, what did it matter if one accepted money or not from wicked old Lords, who forced it upon one? Not that Margery intended to keep the money. She did not want it. She did

not want anything, But she could easily return it afterwards, she thought, and she would not have Una betrayed to her brother. How it would shock him!

Margery herself had been shocked! She had looked upon Una at first as a being of another sphere from herself, so unBohemian as not even to require to be respectable. The illusion had been shaken once or twice, but it was thoroughly dispelled now. All her illusions were being dispelled, even that other illusion about her owing gratitude to Allan for his love to her. Why should she be grateful to him? Did not she know by this time that almost every man she came across would love her, if she only let him? Ought not Allan to be grateful that she allowed him to do so? She did not know whether she could much longer. What had Dalrymple and Lottie been talking about? Lottie was going to

bed now, and saying good night to the artist.

We, who have privileges that Margery had not, can hear what they had been talking about. Lottie had walked up to the artist, when Allan had left her.

"Mr. Bruce, I think you are an old friend of Harry Yorke's."

Dalrymple had bowed. He and the heiress were on the very coolest terms; she had never given him a regular sitting yet, and he was painting her picture under difficulties. One day he had objected, and Lottie had said, "You've got its price, and I don't see what it matters to you whether the likeness is good or not, so long as I don't complain. You can make a pretty picture of it anyhow, and you need not expect I should put myself out for you to win honour by me before the public."

Since that day the artist had not ex-

changed many words with her. He would have given up the picture, and returned the money, only he had not got it, and he wished to stay on at the Priory. He had no other excuse.

He was surprised now at being spoken to, but he bowed, and replied,

"We were at school together."

The heiress sat down on an ottoman, and motioned to him to sit down beside her; but Dalrymple had a good deal of pride in his composition, and he would not at once accept the proffered olive branch. He remained standing before her.

"And you know," continued Lottie, "that he is very much in debt?" The artist started a little. He was watching her closely now. So this little Yankee heiress was so wholly mercenary that, having rammed it down his throat, till he was sick of it, that he painted for money, she now did

not recognise genuine affection when she saw it, and believed Yorke only cared for her on account of his debts! Lottie continued, "When Mr. Stapleton left him just now he was looking over the Continental Bradshaw. From something he said—from something I have heard, I believe even if he sells out it won't help him much; he'll have to go abroad, if he don't want to—— But it doesn't matter. The truth is, Mr. Bruce, if Harry Yorke leaves the Army, you must know he is done for. He'd keep straight enough in it, with all the *esprit de corps* and the feeling of being known, and all that, and a little regular work, though it is not much. It seems to me as idle a life as there is, your Guardsman's, but still it is something. And if he gets knocking about on the Continent with nothing to do, and no friends, and no money in his pockets, he'll come to grief

altogether. In a year or two he wouldn't be the same Harry Yorke we know now." The heiress's voice faltered a little. Dalrymple was watching her closely. He sat down now. And Lottie felt the significance of his doing so, and at once proceeded more confidentially, "I know I haven't behaved very prettily to you sometimes, Mr. Bruce, and it has been real mean of me to have you down here to paint my picture, and then to behave to you as I have done, but it—it hasn't been all sunshine for me down here, and I've had no one else to show my temper to, and somehow you provoked me. It seems like a fitting retribution that I should have to ask a favour of you now. But there's no one else here who could manage it for me, and I know you could do it, if you would. Do you think you'd take a little trouble for

me, Mr. Bruce, in spite of my treating you so nastily?"

"Pray don't mention it," said Dalrymple. He did not particularly care about her apologies, except when she said "It hadn't been all sunshine for her." He knew that so well. But he wanted to know what the favour was.

"You see it is such a shame a young fellow like that should go to the bad all for the want of a little money," said Lottie, looking at him somewhat anxiously, "and there's nothing I should like better than to help him, but of course he wouldn't take it from me."

"No, of course not," said the artist.

"Still there are ways of arranging things," persisted Lottie. "And when a young fellow is hard up, I fancy he don't look very close into the quarter the money

comes from. Don't you think you could buy up his bills."

"What! I?" cried the artist.

"With my money, of course," said Miss Spluck. "You see, there is nothing I should like better than to help him, and I don't know how much his debts are, but of course they'd be nothing to me. It seems too bad I shouldn't help him. I could do it so easily. And why shouldn't I do what I like with my own?"

"Up to how much would you be prepared to go?" asked Dalrymple. He was studying the pattern of the carpet, or he would have seen that Lottie's eyes were now full of tears. "Would ten thousand be too much?"

"Ten—twenty. What you like," cried Lottie. "I only want to save him. He'd be such a nice young fellow if he stayed on in the Army. And I'd have nothing to

do but to sell out a little, however much it might be."

Dalrymple leant back and laughed.

"'Pon my word, it is refreshing to hear you talk," he said. "And I always fancied you a little mercenary. It seems I wronged you. Well, I'll do what I can, Miss Spluck. Only if Yorke ever hears of this, he'd be fit to blow his brains out. You won't get much gratitude from him."

"He must never hear of it," said Lottie, seriously, "not till I am dead."

The artist looked at her. Had the girl then any idea herself that she was ill? He did not know. She looked very delicate, with her little, slight figure, and pink colour, and bright blue eyes; but though she looked grave, perhaps she was only thinking about Yorke.

"I'll make Yorke promise to take no steps till I go up to town," said Dalrymple,

quietly. "I suppose you'll be in a hurry to sit to me now, and send me off. I can't go, of course, till I finish your picture."

"I'll sit to you whenever you like," interrupted Lottie.

Dalrymple bowed. "And I'll ask him to write me a statement of what he owes. And as soon as I've found out what it all comes to—the Jews' bills will probably come down a little, and, in fact, I daresay they all will with a little management—but as soon as I know what it is I will send you in the account, that you may be satisfied no money sticks in my hands during the transaction."

"Mr. Bruce, if I did not regard you as a gentleman, I should not have appealed to you to help me," cried Lottie, starting from him a little indignantly. It was that movement that Margery saw.

"Indeed, you are very good. I thought

you looked upon me as a man who painted portraits for money."

"There! then I did provoke you," cried Lottie, clapping her hands with delight. "I beg your pardon. But I can't help being glad a little, because when one has said something waspish, one likes to think the sting was felt, and you always looked so impenetrable."

Dalrymple was amused in spite of himself. "Do you want to pay all Yorke's debts, or only to prevent his having to sell out?" he asked.

"What do you think?" said Lottie.

"I think the less you pay the better, if you don't want him to suspect it comes from you. But if you'd leave it to me——"

"I will leave everything to you," said Lottie.

"Then you trust me completely?"

"Yes."

"And may I—may I—" asked Dalrymple. "I don't think at this moment Yorke cares much whether his debts are ever paid or not. May I encourage him to suppose that some day something he does care about may come to pass?"

"What! that I should become Mrs. Harry? No, that can *never* be," said Lottie, gravely. "*Never*, Mr. Bruce."

"Poor Yorke then!" said Dalrymple. "Do you know I'm not often reminded of a text, but there's one you remind me of now. He asks for love, and you give him a lump of gold."

"No, I don't. I give him a cheque," said Lottie. "There it is. Blank, with my name at the bottom. And as I thought you might prefer not drawing all at once, there are two of them. Now you can make off with all my fortune, if you like.

There! now never say 'I didn't trust you again."

"Miss Spluck, I beg your pardon. But do you know I am a poor man?" said Dalrymple.

"I'm not afraid," said Lottie.

"But I am," said Dalrymple. "The devil might tempt me, and who knows what would be the end of it? Fill up one of those cheques for £5,000, that's as much as I'll be trusted with, but don't give it to me anyhow, till just as I am going away from here. No, Miss Spluck, I absolutely refuse to take a blank cheque from you."

Lottie looked surprised. "Now that beats me," she said. "You really can't trust yourself."

"Think, if it was stolen from me—if I lost it!"

"See what a valuable thing I am giving Mr. Yorke in exchange for the love you

say he asks for. He doesn't, poor Harry!"

"I don't think Yorke will think it a good exchange, and I don't know that I do either," said the artist, leaning back a little wearily. Lottie looked up, once more surprised. "Nay, don't think I'm making love to you—that is the last thing I meant you to imagine. I was only speaking of love in the abstract, of course. Now I'll go and make Yorke promise not to do anything rash before I go up to town, and whilst I'm about it, I'll try to find out about how much his liabilities are."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Bruce," said the heiress, holding out her hand, and pressing his warmly.

"Not at all. I am Yorke's friend, and have acted throughout as such. If you will remember, I have not once attempted to dissuade you from such a flagrant waste

of money as no friend of yours could possibly sanction."

"I have no friends," said Lottie.

"Poor child!" He was still holding her hand, looking down at her compassionately, the little, slight figure, and the pink colour, that came and went. How little they could either of them imagine the next time they should talk seriously together! This was the first time—and the next?

Margery did not draw the curtains over her window that night. She had given up the battle—she must think. She threw a shawl round her, and stole out into the night. Up and down the beech-tree avenue she paced, as if possessed. When she stole home again about one o'clock, she saw a figure standing in the shadow almost under her window. She was close upon it before she saw it, and stood still, trembling. The

figure crossed its arms, then strode past her, crushing the gravel hard as it passed. It was Dalrymple Bruce. He had been standing under her window, looking up. Margery had seen him; her heart bounded with joy, and she went into the house, and locked the door of her room, and lay on her bed and cried. Lottie slept on the other side of the house. After all, he did not care for Lottie. It was under her window he stood and watched.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW THERE A MINUTE.

A SLIGHT, girlish figure in a muslin dress, far too light for the season, fluttering down the cypress alley, and a young man in a shooting-coat, with his head somewhat bowed. It was thus Allan and Lottie met in the afternoon, whilst Margery was, as she had said she would, giving Dalrymple another sitting. Lottie had sat to him all the morning.

"You here, Mr. Stapleton! I never met you here before."

"No! Is it a favourite walk of yours? It is very picturesque, and all that, but

rather gives one the blues, don't you think?"

"Is that the reason you were looking so tragic when I first caught sight of you—your head bent, your mind on melancholy thoughts intent—melancholyborrowed from the cypress boughs?"

"No, I don't think it was that altogether," said Allan, smiling a little sadly, and pushing his hat to the back of his head.

Lottie liked to see him like that. She thought him so handsome and so manly, with his light curling hair and well-knit figure. The sight encouraged her to pluck up heart and speak boldly.

"Miss Travers is sitting for her picture, I suppose. Does that account for the melancholy?"

"I suppose so," said Allan, after a pause.

"What nonsense!" cried Lottie, indignantly. "You may be as much in love as you like, Mr. Stapleton; but it is not because you don't see Miss Travers for an hour or two, that you were looking so down, when I first caught sight of you?"

"Well, why was it?" asked Allan.

"You know," said Lottie.

"No, I don't."

"Well then, if you don't, I am not going to tell you, for you to hate me ever after for being the first person that dared to say it to you. There now!" said Lottie. She looked very defiant, and very pretty, but she was quaking in her shoes.

"You mean that she does not care for me?" said Allan, after a little pause. "How should she? A stupid, blundering fellow like me, who's wasted all his time, had no particular abilities to start with, and done nothing to improve them."

"I don't know anyone else who would describe you in that way," said Lottie, speaking very firmly, though she dared not look up, for fear he should see the tears in her eyes.

"How else would anyone describe me?" asked Allan. His voice had sounded so utterly spiritless since he said Margery did not care for him that Lottie's heart bled to hear him. There was a want of tune in the very voice with which he spoke the words, as if everything were out of tune now.

"Anyone else would say of you," said Lottie, "that you were too humble ever to appreciate your own merits, too honourable ever to imagine want of honour in another, and that you had the manliest spirit and the tenderest heart of any man in the county. Yes, Allan Stapleton, I've often heard people speak of you."

"Nobody ever spoke so kindly of me as you," said he, with a little pathetic attempt at a smile. "But what does it all matter, since Margery does not think so?"

"Is Margery all the world?" asked Miss Spluck, impatiently.

"Yes, yes! To me she is all the world," answered Allan.

Poor Lottie! that was a heavy blow to her. She was silent a few moments before she spoke again. Then she said,

"Why do you care about her caring for you? She is going to marry you, is she not? You are to be married on the Ninth, I think."

"Yes, on the Ninth," said Allan, dreamily. "We fixed it only yesterday. But I have made up my mind to set her free—to release her from her engagement."

Lottie's heart gave a great jump.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean," said he, "that I know now I have been very selfish—very cruel. I knew Miss Travers when she knew no one. I asked her to marry me, and she said she would. But she told me frankly even then that, if she had all the world to choose from, she would not have chosen me. Now she has stayed here some time, and seen other men, and it is not to be wondered at that she finds she does not care for me. I mean to set her free. But it will break my heart to do so."

"Allan—Mr. Stapleton, not now," cried Lottie, giving up the struggle at once, as she heard his half sob, which somehow curiously enough she echoed, though he was too miserable to take notice of it. "Not this week. If you offer her her freedom now, she will accept it, and if it breaks your heart, why not—why not wait till next week? I daresay she would tell

you then it had all been a mistake, and that she had been dreaming, and would rather marry you than anyone. And then you would be happy, would you not?"

Lottie's own face was streaming with tears.

"But why—why? What do you mean? Do you think she cares for anyone else, anyone in particular?" asked Allan, drawing hot, quick breaths, and staring at her.

"Oh, no one—no one, unless it is you. Only wait till next week to offer to break off your engagement. Do as I ask you," pleaded Lottie.

"But you—why are you crying?" asked Allan, passing his arm round her as if to support her in her sorrow.

"Oh, nothing—it is nothing," said Lottie. "It is only my hysterical way, whenever I am excited about anything,

and you talked just now of your heart being broken." And certainly Lottie was not thinking much what she was doing, as for one moment she leant her head on Allan's shoulder, and rested it there. Then the next moment she looked up with a smile, dashing the tears away with her hand. "There! I'm all right now," she said. "Somehow you treated me in such a motherly way I felt quite queer. I never had a mother, you know. And people should always be scolded when they are at all hysterical. Now I think I'll go in and lie down a little. No! don't come with me. Stay there, and—and *take my advice*, Mr. Stapleton." She seemed so out of breath as she spoke these last words that Allan felt quite confused by her manner. Besides, what could she mean by bidding him not break off his engagement till the week following? Anyhow, he would take her

advice. He was certainly in no hurry to set Margery free.

Meanwhile, there had been the best sitting in the impromptu studio that Margery had yet given the artist, as far as painting went. They had barely exchanged a word till, after about an hour, Dalrymple had looked up and said,

"I am afraid you may be tired. That will quite do for to-day. I shall only trouble you once more. Perhaps you would kindly give me another sitting to-morrow. I hope to get away the day after."

And Margery had got up with her heart swelling, and walked away without saying anything. This was to be the end of it all, was it? He was to go away to-morrow, and he spoke of it coolly like that. He *hoped* to get away to-morrow! She was in the mood to do anything, good or

bad, according as circumstances suggested. Sometimes we see women's faces most unwomanly, seen for a moment by the lamplight as we drive home from the Opera, "La Traviata" or "Don Giovanni," as the case may be, and turn away in disgust, so pained are we by the roses in the hair and the paint upon the cheeks; but how often has not the beginning been the same. Wounded affections, and circumstances that led *that* way! If people would but once realise that there are very few men or women whose principles are firm enough to withstand a sudden shock of pain, and that most start in life with hearts capable of love! But people do not realise this, therefore this hardness towards those who yield to the guiding of circumstances, this profound indifference as to what the guiding of circumstances now is for the majority of men, and for some women. The generations

that come after us will wonder at this last. We suffer under it, for all the shelter of our guarded homes. To sit safe and at ease, and extend no hand to those perishing through our want of thought, and perishing so painfully! It requires resolution and fortitude, such as should hardly be expected of a woman, brought up as we are somewhat softly, to look on and smile the while quite kindly on those who will not understand, will not suffer us womanlike to extend a helping hand.

As Margery passed through the billiard-room she saw Lord Talboys knocking the balls about by himself.

"Come and have a game, Miss Travers."

"No, thank you. I am tired. Oh, by the way, Lord Talboys, I could not think of accepting forty pounds from you. And that was what you gave me last night."

"Well, come and let us talk it over together amicably," said he, leading her away into the Italian drawing-room. "There are always people passing in and out of the billiard-room. There now, sit down by the window."

Margery sat down on the low old-fashioned window seat. It was quite a matter of indifference to her what she did. Lord Talboys stood facing her. As he did so he could see past her through the open window, and he smiled at something he seemed to see outside. His smile was a very pointed one, but Margery would not take any notice of it, though it was not lost upon her.

"Why can't you accept forty pounds from me as well as from another man?" asked Lord Talboys, in his most jocular tone. "As Stapleton, for instance."

"Mr. Stapleton has not given me forty

pounds that I am aware of, and I am going to be his wife."

"Are you? Now, do you know, I am not so sure of that. I think you are going to be mine."

"Yours!" and Margery did not start to her feet. She only sat still and laughed scornfully. Such a laugh to proceed from a woman who had an ear for music, a jangling, harsh, discordant laugh! Not even Wagner ever imagined anything more unpleasing to the ear.

"Now, why do you laugh?" said Lord Talboys. "I see nothing to laugh at. I never asked you to care for or respect me. That would be laughable. I know plenty of reasons why you shouldn't do that. But I know no reason why you should not be my wife. Look here, Madge," he went on, quite unconcerted by her expression of profound contempt, and drawing a chair up

to her now, as if about to discuss the matter confidentially, and as between friends. "You're a Travers, you know, and the Travers nature is strong in you, and sooner or later you're sure to go a mucker. The Travers all do. If you were to marry Stapleton—which you'll never do, you mark my words—you'd run away from him within the year to the man you care for. You think I don't know who that is. But I *do*." Now for the first time Margery moved uneasily, and her expression changed. Her eyes assumed that impenetrable air we all of us know so well how to assume, when we mean to baffle curiosity. There was no reading anything in them now except the one terribly betraying fact that she had reasons for not wishing her thoughts to be read. "He hasn't asked you to be his wife," Lord Talboys went on, "or you'd marry him to-morrow. But he

hasn't asked you." There was just a movement on Margery's part, no change in the impenetrable expression of her eyes, but just a quick movement, hardly noticeable, before she sat still as ever again, pinioned, as it were, by Lord Talboys evil eyes. "So you think you'll marry Stapleton. You've a sort of dim idea, lurking somewhere in that beautiful head of yours, that you'll do a good deed by sacrificing yourself to make him happy. Why, you little fool, you're standing between him and the greatest bit of luck that ever befell a poor devil. Look out of the window there a minute."

The window commanded the whole length of the cypress alley. At the far end of it Margery saw Lottie and Allan alone together. There was certainly something in their way of walking together that suggested that they were talking very earnestly, and quite confidentially.

"I tell you that's the way he consoles himself when you go away to make love—to be painted, I mean," he substituted, as he caught a lightning glance from Margery's eyes. "Oh, you women! you always fancy you're like the sun that reigns alone; but you are like the stars, I tell you, and when there is not one there is another of you. Dear Allan is very happy now, I can tell you, and the little heiress would have him yet, for all that is past and gone. Only he is bound in honour to you, you know, *bound in honour*. Why, I tell you, he was half in love with her before ever he saw you, and he'd be married to her now if only he hadn't come across you. That was the unluckiest rencontre that ever a poor beggar made. You came between Stapleton and the biggest heiress out, and a pretty little girl she is, too, into the bargain, and a good

girl too. Make him an excellent wife, and be as happy as the day is long. He was almost bound in honour to her when he met you; but your eyes witched him into the forgetfulness of all that. They've witched me too. But he can't afford it, and I can. I tell you, though, Madge, I think it's uncommon heartless of you not to let poor Stapleton go. If you'd a bit of feeling for him, you would. You can't fancy that your splendid figure, and your magnificent voice—to whose charms, by the way, he is just as insensible as if he were made of putty—but you can't fancy they'll ever make up to a man of his habits for all he'd get with Miss Spluck! You can't fancy him happy, farming in a small way—he! he!" laughed Lord Talboys, while Margery still leant upon her elbow, and looked out, impenetrable, but gloomy now, without ever showing by sign or word

whether she was listening, only watching steadily those two figures at the end of the cypress alley, standing quite still now, and looking into each other's faces, even at this distance evidently agitated. Such a pretty picture they made, the sunshine slanting in upon them through the dark cypress boughs, Lottie so slight and girlish, Allan manly and stalwart, both golden-haired and blue-eyed! Such a pretty, pretty couple they looked! If anyone had seen an etching of them at the head of a poem, the dullest intellect would at once have divined what that poem would be about—True lovers, and probably parting at the end. Why should those two be parted?

Lord Talboys' harsh voice went on.

"A man like Stapleton likes to make a figure in the world, and to live an easy life of it. He'd like to drive a four-in-hand, and scatter money right and left. He'd

do it well, too, with a good heart, and like a gentleman. But Stapleton is not the sort of man to be bothered with babies and butchers' bills. He'd tire of it soon enough, I can tell you, and tell you pretty plain things, too, about what you'd cut him out of, and how much he'd have given up for you. He is a good fellow enough, but not a hero exactly, and you'd never hear the last of that song, not as long as you lived. You might slave and slave, as I've seen women do before now, and to the end it would be he might have married——Why, bless my soul, they seem growing very affectionate," and in his excitement Lord Talboys sprang up, and leant over Margery, the better to see out of the window.

"Oh! I say, lean your head upon my shoulder. Let me put my arm round your waist. How nice it does look, to be sure!"

"Lord Talboys, if you presume to touch

me, I'll—I'll kill you!" cried Margery, looking up at him now, her teeth set, and her eyes flashing such fire as a little indicated how much had been suppressed all this time. "No, don't laugh. Remember I'm half an Italian, and an Italian woman thinks as little of murder at least as an English man. Many a Travers has killed his man before now. Why shouldn't I kill mine?"

"Because you'd rather marry me, Madge. It would suit your book better. Look here, my dear, there shall be no pretence of love between us. You may hate me as much as you like, and despise me *tant qu'il vous plaira.* I love to see your eyes flashing. But I'll settle £8,000 a year on you —£8,000 a year, Madge—and you may go upon the stage, if you like." And Lord Talboys drew a long breath, and watched the effect of his bait.

"Are you serious, Lord Talboys?"

"Perfectly serious, my dear. You shall have it in black and white, if you like. But then you mustn't peach. If I don't have you, I must have Una. Poor little Una! So soft, and white, and pretty! I love Una."

"Poor, poor Una!" said Margery, and shuddered. She was not thinking of Lord Talboys, nor of herself, only of the one woman she had as yet met and dared to love. Margery would have done more to save Una from the dreadful fate impending over her than to save any man, even Dalrymple. For somewhere in her inner consciousness she had the impression, vague but deeply rooted, that is so common in women who have seen chiefly the side of life that had alone met her view, that somehow life was more than fairly safe and easy for men, and that women

were thus in proportion defenceless given over to their destiny, harder oftentimes than any man's. It is possibly quite a false belief, but it would have led to Margery's sacrificing more to save Una than even to save Dalrymple. She would have trusted things would somehow not turn out quite so badly for him; she had no reason to think they might not turn out as badly as possible for Una, who was only a woman.

"Well, save her, then, from the awful fate that is awaiting her, if you don't take pity on me; for she'll have me—I know she will—though even I can't understand why. That has always beaten me; but she will. I tell you what," said Lord Talboys, slapping the window-sill, "if you'll marry me, I'll pay Una's debts just the same—honour bright, I will! Come, now, you are not going to be so absurd as to

pretend that Una cares about marrying me. Some other man will suit her a deal better, when once her debts are paid. I'm frank, you see. Oh, you'll find me a mighty easy person to get on with. We shall suit admirably, for you are frank too."

"I must think," said Margery, drawing a deep breath. "I know Allan does not love Lottie."

He was standing alone now, breaking off some dead twigs. Lottie had passed into the house, and out of sight. She had looked pale, and it had been evident that she was crying.

"He doesn't love her now exactly, perhaps, but he soon would. He didn't seem at all to dislike having her head upon his shoulder. Dear me! it was very touching, their attitude. He drew her towards him so tenderly, and then she rested her head

on his shoulder so confidingly. Poor little heiress!—and is she not to be taken into consideration at all? She does love Allan uncommonly."

"You think so?" asked Margery, looking up quickly.

"Think so! My dear Madge, where have your eyes been?"

"I will *not* have you call me my dear and Madge," cried she, stamping her foot.

"Very well, not just yet. Only £8,000 a year, and leave to go upon the stage, and all Una's debts paid. Think of it a little now. Then Stapleton would marry Miss Spluck, and they'd be as happy as the day is long. She has waited her chance all this time, poor little girl! she should have her turn at last. And a mighty pretty place they'd make of the Priory, when all the mortgages were paid off, and everything. I shouldn't be surprised if it had

to be sold, if Allan married you, and that would break old Sir James' heart, even if you think you could console his son. And then—then," he added, in a low, wheedling tone, "my life is not a particularly good one, and I am sixty, though I don't look it." This was Lord Talboys' vanity; he always fancied people took him for a young man. "And when I'm gone off the hooks, then you'd be Lady Talboys with £8,000 a year, and a European reputation as a singer. Why, I know somebody who might afford to marry you then, though he is not such a fool as to think of it now."

"Lord Talboys," said Margery, speaking in her fullest, richest tones, each syllable accentuated and distinct from every other, "if you ever dare to speak to me in this way again, I'll—I'll make your life such a hell upon earth that you'll thank God when you do go off the hooks, as you

call it. And I'd marry you just in order to do it. But as to the rest that you say, I'll think of it. I know I'm a Travers, and the Travers all go wrong, and what am I that I should strive against it? If Allan knew the truth about me, it would break his heart now, even now. And I believe I should make him miserable if I married him. I always have thought so. So of course it would be much better for him to marry Miss Spluck, if she cares for him: I don't. I never did, I believe. Only now listen to me; you have got to leave this house to-morrow, and if I make up my mind to marry you, I'll follow you without any pressing—I don't care to be pressed. We can be married in a registrar's office—I won't have lying vows—and I expect to have everything you have offered me, £8,000 a year for myself, leave to go upon the stage, and Una's debts paid.

Now, not a word more. You might talk till doomsday, but I won't change one iota. I'll think of it all, and I'll write to you, if I make up my mind to sell myself."

"By gad, if you don't think it is worth thanking for, I retract," cried Lord Talboys. "You shan't go upon the stage."

"What do I care?" laughed Margery. "Do you think I'm going upon the stage, when I'm a Countess? I could be a singer now if I pleased, and I could make as much money as ever I'd care to spend," and she snapped her fingers at him.

Even Lord Talboys was astounded by the transformation in her. All the self-respecting dignity of an English lady had fallen from her, and she stood before him as the incarnation of the bad Bohemian society amongst which she had passed her early days. A breath of the billiard-room seemed to hang about her. He could

almost fancy her, as she now stood before him, marking and smoking a cigarette. Margery smoking a cigarette! Lord Talboys even shuddered at the idea.

"You shall go upon the stage or do whatever you like, only don't look at me like that."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Margery. "No man, be he ever so little a gentleman, can take back an offer he has made twice. You thought me such a simple fool, Lord Talboys! You see, I have outwitted you after all!"

"Go to hell, if you like!" cried he, "only go there as my wife."

"I can't hope to go there without you, in any case," said Margery, and turned and left him.

As she passed through the billiard-room she met Dalrymple carrying some of his painting gear. He looked pale, and his

hair was disordered, as if rough hands had been violently passed through it.

"What! were you listening, Dal?" she asked.

"Listening to another man making love to you?" cried he, angrily. Then he paused for a moment, and looked at her, like one of the poisonous snakes of the Tropics—beautiful, fascinating, deadly. "I have enough to do to make love to you myself, Madge," he said, and threw away his painting things, and for one moment held her in his arms and kissed her. The womanly dignity was all gone; there was nothing to hinder him, or protect Margery. But as his lips touched hers she gave a sudden cry, and extricated herself from his embrace. For one instant she stood and looked at him, white with the dishonour he had done her, disgraced in her own eyes and in his. Then, after that

instant's glance of agonised reproach, she turned and fled from him. Since she was a child no one had kissed her thus, not even Allan; not even her father had dared to do so.

Lord Talboys appeared in the door of the billiard-room.

"I'll thank you to let that alone for the future, Mr. Dalrymple Bruce," he snarled out. His face was very red, and the veins in his forehead swollen.

"Why, what is it to you?" asked Dalrymple, impatiently, almost impertinently, if any man could truly be said to speak impertinently to Lord Talboys.

"Only that I'll thank you to respect the future Lady Talboys."

"The future Lady Talboys! Ha! ha! Is it come to this? Oh, this is too good!" and Dalrymple sat down on a chair and laughed immoderately.

"It seems to amuse you," said Lord Talboys.

"Hugely," laughed Dalrymple, as if he never meant to leave off laughing again. "So she is her father's daughter, after all. But she sells herself dear, I'll warrant."

"I'll thank you not to speak thus of the lady who is to be my wife."

"When she is, fight her battles; but till then she's the girl who kissed me," said Dalrymple.

"Mr. Bruce, you've associated with such a low, common set that you've forgotten the breeding of a gentleman. Another word, and I'll tell Miss Travers herself what you said just now. It is a lie, and you know it. Speak to me again, and I'll tell of you."

"Oh, I've no occasion to exchange words with you," replied Dalrymple, and picked up his painting things, and went off with

them under his arm. "The woman I could have worshipped, and going to be married to Lord Talboys! Well, well!" and a hundred epigrammatic sayings depreciatory of women recurred to his mind. He almost whistled as they did so. But he reached his own room, and his face changed as he closed the door. "If I had a pistol, I'd blow my brains out. There's nothing worth living for now," he said.

The man who desecrates, is, perhaps, more to be pitied than the woman who is desecrated, if we knew the truth. For him there is no holiness in anything any more; she may ascend to a higher worship through the very suffering he has inflicted.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COUNTY ASKED FOR A SONG.

THE little dance that Allan had got up to please Miss Spluck was to come off that night, and Lottie came down into the drawing-room in a ball-dress, looking the very ideal of a partner. Not a jewel ever decorated the heiress now, or attracted attention away from her gleaming hair and wide-open bright blue eyes. And this night one felt at once that a jewel, were it ever so small, would be far too heavy and solid for the fairy-like creature, who seemed to consist of puffs of tulle and lace, fastened together with pink roses and blue

forget-me-nots. There were pink roses hanging from blue forget-me-nots in her ears, and there was a necklet of pink roses and forget-me-nots round her throat, and pink roses and forget-me-nots in her hair, and all about her dress, berthe, tunic, and skirt. Dalrymple looked at her and thought that was how he had meant to paint her. Perhaps it would have been better; she really was very lovely like that. And how happy she appeared, and how defiant with her pink cheeks and bright blue eyes! There was very little else of Lottie. I think her mother would have wept to see her. But at the Priory the young men only thought what a fairy-like creature she was, and what a first-rate partner she would make. Her foot was tapping the floor already in anticipation, and what a pretty little foot it was, with its high instep and tiny satin shoe! Dalrymple was sitting on a low

couch looking at her, his arms folded in that fashion so habitual to him. He was sitting in one of those lounging attitudes, that in most men would have seemed affected, even a little insolent in the presence of ladies, but in him they only looked like his way—a sort of artistic attitude that he had picked up on his travels.

Then Margery came in in Una's white silk dress. She had no diamonds on that night; one missed them, and felt her beauty required them. It was an insult to the taste of the beholder to suppose that that white camellia she had stuck in her hair was any adornment to her; she might as well have had nothing. Certainly her beauty was enough, without anything else, yet it demanded diamonds—it would have given new meaning to emeralds. The Talboys' emeralds were celebrated. Lord Talboys thought of them at once.

Allan stepped forward, and handed Margery a bouquet. It was a very lovely bouquet; everyone had been admiring it a few moments before, but it looked insipid and meaningless now. It seemed a mean thing to offer to Margery. She bowed her head in acknowledgment of it.

"Thank you," she said, without looking at him, or calling him by his name, and she swept on towards Lord Talboys. Her head was not thrown back that night; there was no colour on her cheeks; she looked like a marble figure by a tomb, only perhaps no sculptor has ever carved so ripe a beauty.

Lord Talboys' heart beat fast. He admired Margery greatly, in spite of all his wild past life—in spite of his having given way to every passing fancy, and thus enfeebled them all. He admired her, in spite of all this, as much as he could admire

anyone, and with a passion that surprised himself. With regard to a man like Talboys, one could not use the word love, though he, of course, would have used it. He did not augur well from this gliding, noiseless walk, from this head drooped, and this colourless face. He would rather have seen her proud, scornful, looking upon him as if he were the dust, or even better still, a reptile, that might possibly wound her, but that she despised all the same.

Margery stood still in front of him. In a voice low, but distinct, and perfectly monotonous, she said,

"Lord Talboys, I have considered of the offer you did me the honour to make me this afternoon, and I have determined to refuse it. I beg that it may not be repeated."

She waited for a moment, as if to make sure that he understood.

"Then I shall not go away," said Lord Talboys. "I remain," and the air, with which he announced it, seemed to signify even more than the words. "*J'attends*," he said, defiantly.

"It is nothing to me whether you go or stay," said Margery, and she glided away again, and sat down in the place of state, on the grandest sofa in the room, the place that the Queen would have occupied, had the Queen been staying at the Priory. Margery sat down on the sofa, and raised her bouquet and looked at it. There was a bit of Gardenia in it, and she bent over it, and inhaled its perfume. But all this time she had never once looked up. Was she conscious that the eyes of the whole room were upon her, that Dalrymple had never looked away from her for an instant, and was sitting now glowering at her from his lair among the cushions? He could

not believe himself that he had dared to kiss her; it did not seem possible now. Why had she looked so different only a short while before?

Allan advanced, and stood beside Margery, and said something about the Gardenia, which was a favourite flower of hers. He had sent for it up to town. They had had none in flower at the Priory, and he had been determined she should have some for that night. He stood in front of her like her humble servitor, and Margery said little phrases to him about the bouquet, but she did not look up into his face.

All dinner-time it was the same, only now Dalrymple looked down as much as Margery, and he ate nothing. She did. She ate and drank just as usual, only she avoided looking at Allan. Once she looked up and met Lord Talboys' eyes devour-

ing her face. Her answering gaze was so grave and steady, it was Lord Talboys who looked down abashed. After dinner the county people began to arrive, and Margery opened the ball with Allan. She looked very handsome, very cold, very stately. The county admired her, but it did not envy Allan Stapleton. The young ladies pitied him. He had been a great favourite with some of them. Next time he danced with Lottie. Lottie skimmed the room like a humming-bird, or something lighter still. Allan had often danced with her before, but he had never felt her step so perfectly in unison with his own. He was a first-rate dancer himself, and he began to grow excited, the recollection of the time when he had been in love with Lottie came back to him. He had certainly been in love with her last season. Lottie looked up into his face with her

bright blue eyes; somehow they did not look defiant when they looked at him, they softened then, and there was a quiver about the eyelids. It could not but be pleasant to be looked at like that. Allan asked her for the next dance. He had asked Margery again, and she had answered, "Later on in the evening." He and Lottie danced again and again. After all, the ball had been got up in her honour.

Later on in the evening the artist asked Lottie for a dance. He was looking very pale, and he did so in his most respectful manner, bowing rather lower before her than is the fashion in an English ball-room, and behaving himself altogether rather as if it were an honour than a pleasure he was requesting. Lottie leant her hand upon his shoulder, and was waltzing almost before she was on her feet.

"I was engaged to that hideous, red-

haired fellow, who can't dance a bit," she said, panting, as soon as they stopped again. "But I remembered your dancing, and could not resist it. Why did you not ask me before, till I was engaged for everything, and must behave ill to some one?"

"Miss Spluck was sure to be so sought after, I did not think myself worthy to presume," said the artist, drawing himself up a little, and looking before him into space.

"You thought heiresses did not dance with artists," said Lottie, with a laugh. "And you are punished for your absurdity by my preferring you to an Earl's son. I believe you did not want to dance one bit. Now confess the truth, were you not very much disgusted at my accepting you?"

"It must always be a pleasure to everyone to dance with Miss Spluck. Shall we take another turn?" said the artist. It

seemed he certainly preferred dancing to talking.

Lottie was piqued, and she was wild with spirits. When they next paused, she looked up into his face with her insolent blue eyes.

"Have you danced with Miss Travers yet?" she asked.

Dalrymple turned away suddenly, as if she had slapped him in the face.

"Miss Travers does not seem to care about dancing to-night," he said, folding his arms now, and looking straight in front of him. There in the distance was Margery, standing up with her partner, but not dancing. She certainly seemed to care very little about dancing that night, judging by how little she danced. For everyone asked her, of course, everyone, that is to say, but Lord Talboys and Dalrymple. All the county young men had been intro-

duced, and everyone had asked for at least one dance. No one had asked for more. A beauty so cold and impassive had never been seen in the county before.

One young man, he was rather a wag, and had seen how she had treated the others, was going about the room saying he had been informed she had a very fine voice. "Not that I have heard it," he hastened to add. "I danced a whole set Lancers with her, but I have not heard it yet. When I originally asked her for the dance she bowed her head. When I came to claim her for it, I bowed mine. When I led her back to her seat, we each bowed our heads, that was all. I have not heard her voice yet, but I am told it is very fine."

"Miss Travers does not seem to care about dancing to-night," said Dalrymple, and folded his arms and looked at her.

"Have you asked her?" asked Lottie, looking full at his profile.

She saw the full face now. He turned it angrily on her. "No!" he said, and wanted to begin dancing again.

"Thank you," said Lottie. "I am not going to kill myself just yet. I have been dancing all the while. If you want some one to dance through a whole waltz with you, ask Miss Travers, who has beeu resting herself the whole evening." The demon of mischief was very strong in Lottie that night.

There was a crimson spot on the artist's cheek, but otherwise he was ashy white. There was a strange glow in his eyes, but he answered not a word. Lottie's heart smote her, but she did not know what to say to efface what she had already said. Presently they danced again; then the music ended, and the artist

led her back to her seat, bowed, and left her.

But the county generally was anxious to judge of Miss Travers' voice, of which they had heard such wonderful reports, and, as Margery herself looked unapproachable, Allan was besieged with requests that he would prevail upon her to give them one song. Even Allan was rather shy of asking her that night; besides, it seemed to him a little like making an exhibition of herself. Yet the desire had become so general, it was almost more marked not to agree to it. He went up to her—

"Margery, they all wish to hear you sing. Would you dislike it very much?"

"Do you wish it?" said Margery. How sweet the words might have sounded! But they did not sound sweet at all, neither sweet nor bitter. Yet the stammered "Yes" was hardly out of his lips before

Margery was moving across to the piano. Allan threw it open for her, and there was immediately a crowd round it. Dalrymple, who had been standing in a corner behind it, found himself wedged in. He folded his arms, and leant against the wall; but he did not look at Margery. His head was bent forward, and his eyes fixed upon the carpet. "Perhaps one of the musicians could accompany me," said Margery. Her voice sounded so rich and full, it sent an anticipatory thrill through her audience. No wonder Dalrymple started, yet he certainly had heard it often enough before. The wag of the county began to regret his joke, he should have liked to have heard a little more of that voice. But how cold and proud she looked! Poor Stapleton! poor fellow! "Would you ask them to stand back a little?" said Margery. "It suffocates me to have them crowding

round, and they will hear quite well a little further off." They would certainly hear quite well. When Margery began, people turned round at the furthest corners of the room astonished to listen. Country squires, who were accustomed to hearing their daughters screaming false Italian under their breaths with their mouths half shut, themselves stood open-mouthed now, and stared at Margery. She did not move as she sang, she stood like a statue; but every bit of strength in her full, well-developed figure was being expended in the magnificent burst of song that she was pouring forth. Even the blasée, case-hardened Una was affected, and felt for the moment that there were more things in Heaven and earth than were dreamt of in her philosophy. Lord Talboys thanked heaven she had refused him. He had courage for most things, but he had not

the courage to marry the woman who owned that voice. Allan stood behind her with his head bowed; he looked red and agitated. Dalrymple had slid down into a chair, and was leaning his elbows on the table and covering his face with his hands. He was in a dark corner; nobody noticed him, but it did not matter to him whether they did or not; he was unconscious of everyone, unconscious of everything but Margery and her song. At last she finished, and people felt relieved; it was as if they had asked for a breeze and been given a tornado. By degrees people found breath enough to signify their thanks, but the county generally was not gratified.

"I never heard anything like it at the Opera, even—never!" said one matron emphatically to another. "Poor Mr. Stapleton! he looked quite uncomfortable, and no wonder; it is not the thing for a lady. I really pity him!"

So did they all—they all pitied him. Nobody pitied Margery. Why should they? She was gifted, she was beautiful. It would be absurd to pity her. Dalrymple had stolen away out of the room; he was seen no more after Margery's song.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOO LATE! TOO LATE!

"MR. BRUCE, would it be the same thing to you to have Miss Travers sit to you this morning, and me in the afternoon?" asked Lottie, anxiously and very apologetically the next day. "I am *very* sorry, but I am *so very* tired to-day."

"It will not be necessary for Miss Travers to sit to me again," said the artist, icily, but very politely, "but it will be quite the same thing to me if you give me a sitting this afternoon, so that it is over in time for me to catch the six o'clock train. You certainly do not look fit to sit for your picture this morning."

Margery heard him; she was standing by, and she heard him say that it would not be necessary for her to sit again, and that he was going that day, but she did not move or look round. She was turning over a portfolio of prints, and she only remained rather longer than usual before she laid down the print she was looking at.

"Oh, I look dreadful, don't I?" said Lottie, with a weary little yawn. "Overnightish, and green, and yellow, and horrible!"

"You look ill, certainly," said the artist, looking at her gravely. "You will excuse my not seeing the green and yellow you talk of, but you see I am more accustomed to discriminate colours than you are. At the same time, if you are so kind as to give me a sitting this afternoon, I should advise you to go to bed again for the rest of the morning, Miss Spluck."

"Go to bed again!" said Lottie, shrugging her shoulders. Poor little shoulders! there was so very little of them. "I am in a fever, and couldn't sleep if it was to save my life."

"It may be too late soon," said the artist. He had seen those blue veins before, that hectic colour, those intensely bright eyes. He was sorry at heart for the young girl. She was very pretty, and he had a sort of respect for her. Had he any respect for Margery? He did not know himself. But there was Una with her little fair face, actually acknowledging his existence for once, and saying she must see his picture of dear Margery before he went away, since it was really finished now. He led the way to his studio, and Una followed.

Lottie had gone out to sit under the trees. In a short while Allan joined her.

"Where is Miss Travers?" she asked.

"She is practising—don't you hear her?" said Allan. "She said she must practise to-day, and that she did not like anyone to listen to her then. She always thinks it bores them. It is rather tiresome," said Allan, and picked a daisy and threw it away.

Then he and Miss Spluck talked a very quiet little talk, that was at least very pleasant to one of them. It would not have been very interesting to anyone else —only about dogs, and horses, and flowers, and the dance last night, and nothing very original about any of these subjects. All the mischief seemed gone out of Lottie, as she chatted very pleasantly and comfortably. Allan fetched her some cushions to lean back upon, and a shawl, because he thought the air was keen, though the sun was bright. Lottie said

she would rather have a footstool, and he fetched her that too. Then she insisted upon his smoking, that he might be quite comfortable also. Allan did not care much about smoking, but he lighted a cigar to please her. Lottie, however, did not put on the shawl; she said she was hot.

All the while Margery practised. She was too sick at heart to talk to anyone, and she knew, if she went away to be alone, somebody would be sure to come after her to know what was the matter; besides, whoever did not see her was sure to think she was with some one else. They should all know where she was, and she would be with none of them. She could not sing, but she sat at the piano and played from Chopin. Lady Stapleton lay on the sofa and listened to her. It was rather pleasant, she said, and put one

into a sleepy state, that saved the trouble of thinking. She thought she liked it better than Margery's singing; that sometimes gave her palpitations.

At last, however, she looked up and said,

"You know, my dear, you're much better suited to the stage than anything else. I can't fancy you and Allan at all happy."

"No?" said Margery, pausing for a moment respectfully, but not looking away from her music.

"I've always thought so," said Lady Stapleton. "But of course it was no use saying so. People always will have their own way, however much one tries to persuade them, and talking is so much trouble; but *you* know, my dear, Allan will never satisfy you, and you'll make him miserable."

"Yes?" said Margery.

"Well, then, my dear, why do it?" said Lady Stapleton, rising now, afraid that she might be dragged into what she most dreaded, an argument. "Of course, I don't object—I don't say anything. What use would it be? And it is so much trouble. But it is such a pity you should both be miserable; and, after all, Allan is my only son, and it would have been *so* nice if he had married Miss Spluck!" And so saying, Lady Stapleton left the room.

Margery turned and looked after her. So doing, she became conscious of Lord Talboys sitting at the end of the long drawing-room, with a newspaper ostentatiously spread before him. Of course, he had heard everything, and he looked up now, and glanced at Margery over his newspaper. Margery turned away at once, and began to play again. Never had Chopin been so misused before; twice

she broke down, and had to begin again. While this was going on, Una looked in from the other end.

"Oh, so you two are here together!" she said, in a tone that did not seem particularly pleased with the discovery. "Everyone seems in pairs this morning—Allan and Miss Spluck, Mr. Bruce and I, and you and Miss Travers."

"Miss Travers and I are both here, but not particularly together that I can see," said Lord Talboys. "Your mother has only just gone away, too."

"You seem particularly anxious to prove that you are not a pair," said Una, coolly, sinking into a low chair, while Lord Talboys ogled her lovingly, and she paid no attention. "Margery, do leave off. I want you to come here and talk," and she beckoned to a seat on the sofa beside Lord Talboys.

"I must practise," said Margery. "I have not practised for a long time, and Allan left me on purpose. I have promised to ride with him in the afternoon."

"So Allan has given you leave of absence conditionally. I must say, very gracious of him," said Una, with a low laugh. "But I'll answer for it, he'll forgive you if you leave off practising for a moment. And I want to tell you what I think of your pictures. Which of the two do you like best?"

"Are there two?" asked Margery, in a tone of surprise, but not even yet removing her hands from the keys.

"Are there two?" echoed Una. "Do you mean to say you have not seen them?"

"I have been sitting to Mr. Bruce, because he thought I was a model that would suit him," said Margery. "He did not offer to show me his picture, and having

sat only to oblige him, I was not likely to ask."

"There! do you hear, Mr. Bruce? Are you not ashamed of yourself?" asked Una. Dalrymple had followed her in at the open door, and Margery saw him now, and grew scarlet. "How many hours have you made poor Miss Travers sit motionless opposite to you, and you have never even offered her a sight of your pictures to reward her?"

"I could not think that would be any reward," said the artist, speaking low and huskily. Then he glided away again. And Una got up, and followed him.

"It is dull in here," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders as she went.

"Yes, very dull," said Lord Talboys. "If you would only stay and amuse me!"

"If you want me, come and find me in the sunshine," said Una, over her shoulder.

"But if you would rather stay with Miss Travers in the shade, pray do. I do not want you in the least."

Lord Talboys stayed with Margery, but there was no further interruption to the practising till the gong sounded for luncheon. It was certainly very rude in her to have been so persevering in practising, but then why had they all persisted in coming into the long drawing-room, where no one ever came till evening in an ordinary way?

Lottie had always sat to the artist out of doors, and as she was going out with him this afternoon for their last sitting, they passed the horses at the door, and Dalrymple started.

"Miss Travers is never going to ride the chestnut, surely? Why, it has not been out of the stable for a week!"

"It is the quietest horse we've got," said Allan. "She is only playful." He spoke

very quietly, and as if it did not concern the artist in the least. He was seeing the girths of his own horse tightened. Dalrymple gnawed his lip, as if he would willingly have gnawed it off, he was so annoyed with himself for having spoken. Margery was standing before the hall door receiving sugar from a servant to give to Allan's horse. She never moved, nor looked round.

"Miss Travers is a very good rider," said Lottie, gently. She was really sorry for the artist now. Perhaps Margery was sending him away, but anyhow he was going, and he seemed very miserable. She was quite sorry for him. He really had taken her fancy very much in the first instance, she had said it was so refreshing to meet an Englishman who was not stolid at all. Certainly that was a fault with which no one could reproach Dalrymple.

"With her figure she cannot help having a good seat," Dalrymple said now. "But there is a great difference between that and being a good rider. However, it is certainly Stapleton's affair, not mine," and he laughed bitterly.

Lottie did not like to hear him, and partly to turn his thoughts, she began at once. "Now, Mr Bruce, you cannot hesitate any longer to take this cheque I have written. I have made it out, as you said you wished, and thank you so very much for the trouble you are willing to take."

"Oh, don't thank me," said the artist.

"Yes, but I must," retaliated the heiress. "It is all very well to say you do it for Mr. Yorke, but I asked you, and I am under a great obligation to you."

"How can anyone be under an obligation to me?" said Dalrymple, wearily. "The most miserable creature on all God's earth.

There, Miss Spluck, if you will sit down there, it will do very nicely, and I need not detain you for long. Of course I'll do what I can to set Yorke on his legs again. Not that I fancy he much cares whether he goes to the dogs or not."

"Oh, but he soon will," said Lottie, shaking her head sagaciously. "Fancies of that sort pass very quickly, and are soon forgotten, don't you think?" she was not speaking at all with reference to Harry Yorke now, she was genuinely sorry for the man she was talking to.

"Some men—forget—some things," said the artist, slowly. "Now, Miss Spluck, if you will forgive me, I think I have got your malady—a headache, and I shall be able to release you much sooner, if you will excuse my talking to you."

Lottie answered nothing, and Dalrymple painted on. Gradually she saw his face

calming, he was becoming interested in his work. It was the most successful picture he had yet made, exactly in the style after his own heart. Margery had divined at once what he could manage. As for her own pictures they were failures, demanding the high art, for which Dalrymple had never sufficiently studied.

At last he had so far recovered himself as to look up and say—

"I shall certainly not have many more lady sitters, if I treat them all as cavalierly as I treat you, Miss Spluck."

"Never mind," said Lottie, with a little wave of her hand. "You are succeeding very well with my picture. I am quite satisfied with it. It is very pretty."

"It is sadder than I intended," said the artist, pausing and comtemplating it for a moment or two.

"Yes, I can't fancy I ever look quite

so sentimental," said Lottie, laughing.

"I have seen you look so," said the artist. "Miss Spluck, will you forgive me asking you a question?"

"A hundred, if you like," said Lottie.

"I only want to ask one. Is it long since you have seen a doctor?"

"I saw one the other day," said Lottie, changing colour and looking away. "That was why I made that expedition over to —— all by myself, that they made such a fuss about. The doctor there is very celebrated. They say he'd have made a fortune, if he had gone to London. I think he is a first-rate man."

"And what did he say to you?" asked the artist, looking closely at her. It certainly was rather an impertinent question.

"He said it didn't matter much what I did, I'd better enjoy myself," said Lottie, looking him full in the face without blench-

ing. "He is a dear good man—that he is. Some men would tell a girl lies. I like that doctor."

"Those country doctors always make mistakes," said Dalrymple, hastily, and looking down. His eyes filled with tears. He was certainly very impressionable, and though he had long believed the girl could not live, it gave him a new sensation to think she knew it herself. He proceeded with his painting in silence. "I think I can let you go now," he said. "I may be able to add a few touches still, but that may just as well be done afterwards as now."

Lottie got up to look at it, and the artist began collecting his things.

"Hark ! what was that ?" cried Lottie.

For one instant Dalrymple stood pale, petrified beside her. The next he had bounded away. It was the thud of a horse's hoofs on the road beneath that

they had heard. The chestnut was running away. For one instant he saw it all, the horse frightened, straining every nerve, Margery, white as death, holding on to the pommel, the next instant she was thrown, and the artist was beside her, one arm trying to raise her.

"Oh! if you are dying, forgive me before you die," he cried, in the tones of despair.

"Forgive *you*, Dal!" and she rested her head on his arm, and smiled, while her eyes closed.

Dalrymple thought she had fainted. "My life! my love! my soul!" he cried. "I have no soul but through you. Oh! Margery, if you knew how I loved you! And you think wealth and title of more worth than a poor man's whole heart. Oh! if we had met sooner, I would have shown you what love can dare and do! If we had met sooner—sooner!"

He was beside himself. Margery opened her eyes again, and looked at him. She had not fainted, she had heard every word, and there was Allan coming up to them leading his horse.

"Mr. Stapleton!" she gasped out, and pointed, and tried to raise herself from Dalrymple's arms. But the fright or the emotion had been too much for her, and she fell back once more, almost fainting.

"My dearest, are you hurt?" asked Allan, bending over her with a face almost as white as her own. He had not been so affectionate to her as usual of late, he intended to set her free from her engagement, but this accident had called forth all his love for her again. It was strange, too, to see her in the arms of another man.

"Some water—water, Allan," she said.

Dalrymple ought to have offered to fetch it,—he knew he ought, and that Allan was

looking at him as if he thought so; but he bent lower over Margery. And Allan, seeing her so white, bounded away at once to fetch the water.

"My own darling! my queen! my empress!" cried Dalrymple, holding her tighter in his arms, as he thus once more secured a quiet *tête-à-tête*. "You are not hurt. I know you are not hurt, or every pulse in me would throb responsive. Forgive me, Margery! But you don't know what it is to leave you to fortune and grandeur, and to go forth and battle with the world again, a hopeless, broken-hearted man. Yet it is something still to think that you can never love your husband. That one comfort I take with me. And now, farewell! farewell for evermore! I cannot wait till the others come back. Let me take leave of you now."

He could not embrace her even now.

Lottie was coming up to them already, Allan was returning with the water. "I will run to the house," he said, with a sudden thought, "and tell them to send the phaeton. It was to come round about this time." Dalrymple sped away. It was just as well he did so, the others thought, for as he laid her in Lottie's arms, Margery fainted quite away. She was taken home in the phaeton, and taken straight to her room to lie down. She was not hurt, she said, only shaken. A good deal shaken, they all thought, when she appeared the next day about noon.

Allan wanted to pile up cushions for her and make her comfortable. Margery would not have it. Lord Talboys drew down the blinds, and she thanked him.

CHAPTER XXII.

YOUR YACHT IS RIGHT AS A TRIVET, MY LORD.

LORD TALBOYS' yacht had been longer repairing than yacht ever was before. It had sustained some damage in a squall off Cowes, and it had been two months in dock since then. There could be no doubt that it was fit for sea again now, and even if Lord Talboys had not chosen to avow it, there was Dick Woodward who had seen it, and he shook his great head, and said, "Right as a trivet."

Una's tactics had, for some time, been rather a puzzle to Lord Talboys; he now saw through them. She no longer seemed jealous of his attentions to Margery, but

rather sought every possible means of throwing them together. It was evident that she had a keen insight, and saw at once that she had no chance against Margery. Well, then, let Lord Talboys have Margery, if he wished it! That would, at least, save her brother, who would, of course, take refuge in Lottie; and as for Una, she, if she could not have Lord Talboys, would smile again on Dick Woodward, who was nearly as rich, though, unfortunately, he was not an earl. Dick, indeed, was of no family in particular. People said his grandfather was a coal-heaver, and Dick himself had the dimensions of one. He might have done good work as a stevedore, but, as a rich man, he had no gifts at all. People said he drank, but, for a man who was so rich, it was certainly an unfortunate thing that his favourite beverage was beer. He had

once got into a crack regiment, and had soon got out of it again. There had been one or two awkward stories that nobody cared about repeating to ladies. So of them Una might very fairly be supposed to know nothing. But it was believed she had objected to his beer, and that it was some quarrel about this that had led to her throwing him over for Lord Talboys. Certainly Dick had, at one time, been a very favourite admirer. He had had the biggest yacht afloat, till Lord Talboys had built his and cut him out. Some people said it was a dirty trick of the earl's, thus entering into competition with a Ryde upstart, for Dick had never yet succeeded in getting into the Cowes squadron. He had very nearly succeeded once or twice, but had always just missed it. It had been an understood thing that, if he married Una Stapleton, he was to be admitted; Una's influence

was very great at Cowes. It was a wonderful thing to see Dick away from his yacht at this season of the year; he hardly seemed to understand it himself, and appeared at the Priory in faded blue serge, and an enormous pearl pin, his usual get-up. As to going after partridges, it was more hopeless asking him to do so than any of the other men. Dick never shot. It was rather formidable—this arrival of his; he had come for a week, and then he was going afloat again, and he reported Lord Talboys' yacht quite ready. Now Lord Talboys had invited Una and several other ladies for a cruise in his yacht as soon as she should be ready. If he did not repeat the invitation now, of course it was decisive, and Una would go with Dick Woodward and Mrs. Wellesley, who was quite ready to play propriety. There was only a week, and Dick was starting. Lord

Talboys understood how much depended upon it. Una understood it perfectly. Even Dick understood it as well as his thick head ever understood anything.

Lord Talboys saw there was no time to be lost. He seized the first opportunity he could. Margery had not ridden again since the day of the accident, she seemed to have been a great deal shaken, she was lying down resting now in the Italian drawing-room. Everyone else had gone out with the exception of Lord Talboys. He had said he had letters. Una had accepted his excuse with the greatest facility, and had gone out herself under the escort of Dick Woodward. It was to be presumed that Lord Talboys' letters had not taken long, for hardly had the others disappeared, before he was finding his way into the Italian drawing-room. He paused at the door and looked in. There lay

Margery on the great uncomfortable sofa, her head lying back on the yellow damask, the long lashes trailing on her cheeks, colourless and immovable, as if she were dead. Lord Talboys' boots creaked a little, and she opened her eyes, and looked up. She seemed almost to have been expecting him, she looked so little surprised.

"I am sorry to see you have not yet recovered from—the effects of your accident," said Lord Talboys, perhaps a trifle sarcastically.

There was a quiver over Margery's pale face, but she answered nothing.

"May I ask, Miss Travers, if you have yet considered the proposition I had one evening the honour of making to you?" said Lord Talboys, deciding it was best to come to the point at once. "I think I have gathered that you certainly do not intend

to marry Mr. Stapleton, though the 9th is fixed for your wedding."

Margery shuddered. Then, after a few moments' silence, she said,

"Why do you wish to marry me, Lord Talboys? You do not love me."

"Do I not?" he said, drawing nearer to her, while Margery rather shrank away from him. "If I have not told you so before, it was that I thought it might be distasteful to you. I am an old man, though I do not look it," said Lord Talboys, "and as far as love-making goes, a beautiful young creature like you might prefer it from one younger and more attractive. But how can you doubt that I love you, Madge? What other reason have I for wishing to marry you? And what will my existence be after I have married you? Either you will go upon the stage, and I shall be a sort of secondary, a disagree-

able background to the particular star of all the world, the old, ugly husband of Europe's most beautiful singer. Or, if you do not go upon the stage, I shall yet have to give up all my old habits. Society will not easily pardon us. The Stapletons are too well known and well liked, and though the men might forgive you, the ladies won't, and they'll neither of them forgive me, an ugly old man, who has led a vicious life, and is not of any use any longer, now he can't marry anyone's daughter."

"And why do you covet this sort of life that you describe so graphically?" asked Margery, half closing her eyes again.

"Because I love you, Madge, as I never loved woman before. Because one word from you, one look at you, makes me forget everything else. It is so with everyone. I was in love with Una, just as her brother was in love with Miss Spluck. We

both forgot everything when we saw you. Pah! I cannot look at Una now."

"Do you think Allan was in love with Miss Spluck before he knew me?" asked Margery, overlooking the rest of his speech. There was a sort of tremble in her voice, as she said his name, that might have made Lord Talboys wonder.

"That he was. And that he will be again. These young fellows, there's no depending upon them. But I am not young, Margery, and I should like to have your beautiful face sitting opposite to me in the evenings, and your beautiful voice singing me to sleep. I haven't led a good life, child, and there's no pleasure in looking back upon it. I want something to distract me, and you would distract me. You absorb me entirely. When Miss Stapleton asked me the other day to go out into the sunshine with her, or remain in the

shade with you, I remained in the shade. And so I would always. I'd rather bear sorrow with you than joy with anyone else. I'd rather have frowns from you than smiles from any other woman, were she ever so lovely. And I wouldn't be a jealous husband, Madge. I'd trust you; you should see plenty of other men. Only one kind you shouldn't see. I'd have no artists about." Margery sprang up from the sofa, her cheeks flamed, her chest panted. "There! there! take it quietly," said Lord Talboys. "He's taken it very quietly, I am sure. He has gone away, and he knows you are to be my wife."

"Who told him?" asked Margery. Even yet she seemed hardly able to speak.

"I did. When I found him taking liberties with you, I thought it was high time to interfere, and take care of you, since

you didn't seem able to take care of yourself. And he went away quite comfortably next day. He has been writing to Miss Spluck, since he went. What, didn't you know? Oh, he hasn't been writing to you? I thought not. Well, he has been writing once or twice to her. And he has gone back to Florence. Lady Something this, and the Honourable Miss Something else both happened to be going to Italy this year, and have kindly consented to sit to him for their portraits there. So there was nothing any longer to detain him. It strikes me, do you know, that he was in a great hurry to get back to Florence. And yet it is odd too. Perhaps the little American girl refused him. She seemed a good deal excited about his letters, I thought. You see you've been coming down so late, you missed it all. But there certainly was an uncommonly deep flirta-

tion between them, uncommonly deep. Do you recollect how they used to avoid each other as a general rule, and then sometimes I've seen them talking together as thick as thieves? Oh, he'd got an artistic eye, that young man, and, wherever he found it, he admired beauty. I wonder if he kissed her too. I don't care, I'm sure, if he did. Ha! ha! she's not my style. But I was not going to put up with his hauling you about, so I just told him to keep his hands to himself, and that you were going to be Lady Talboys. He seemed to find it an excellent joke. Dear me! how he laughed! I can hear him still. A confoundedly impudent fellow! It is wonderful how impudence takes with you ladies."

It seemed Lord Talboys would go on for ever, if Margery did not somehow stop him. She spoke now very low and tremulous, and without looking up.

"Lord Talboys, do you think that I should make you happy, if I married you just as I am, without caring for you one bit?"

"Why, I couldn't expect you to care for me—I couldn't expect it," said the earl, moving uneasily in his seat.

"No. But would it make you happy?" asked Margery.

"Why, it is just what I'm wishing—what I've been asking you to do all along."

"Yes, I know," said Margery, and leant back and closed her eyes again, and spoke very wearily. "Well, I'll do it."

"You'll do it!" cried the earl, triumphantly, and drew a little nearer.

"That is not necessary," said Margery, and waved him away. "Remember, we are not married yet."

"No, but we will be," said Lord Talboys,

not a whit disconcerted. "The same agreement to stand as before, I suppose. But I'll be blowed, Margery, if I'll pay Una's debts if she marries that cad Woodward!"

"Poor Una!" said Margery, faintly. "But I don't care about the agreement. I'll marry you unconditionally, Lord Talboys."

"You will, will you!" he cried. "But you shan't lose by that, I can tell you. I'll settle every penny I can upon you. I'll be hanged if I don't!"

"Do as you like," said Margery; "it will make no difference to me. Only let it be quickly. I can't stay on at the Priory now."

"I'll write to my lawyer at once," said Lord Talboys.

"And if it makes any delay, don't mind about the settlements," said Margery, ris-

ing. "I trust you completely, Lord Talboys. I know you would always take care that I was amply provided for. You are a gentleman, after all, and could never do such a dastardly act as I am doing now—to Allan. Only a woman could act like that. You are not engaged to Una, and I dare not break off my engagement. I have not the strength. But I will go away with you—the serpent that came into this house and warmed itself, and went away and left its sting behind."

She passed out of the room as she finished speaking, and left Lord Talboys staring after her aghast. He was for a moment reminded of her song at the ball, when he had thanked heaven she had refused him. Would not Una, after all, make a more comfortable wife?

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOD BLESS YOU, MARGERY!

MARGERY sent down word that she had a headache that night and could not appear at dinner. She locked her door, and would not admit anyone. When she thought everyone had gone to bed, she threw a shawl over her head and stole out into the Park.. She had not been able to think for a moment yet. What! Dalrymple had known, that she was deceiving Allan, and himself, and everyone, and was meaning to marry Lord Talboys. She was not then, but he had believed it, and he had gone away and left her. That was what he had meant by wealth and title. It

had puzzled her a little, but now she understood it. No wonder he had thought that the girl who loved wealth and position so much as to contemplate such a step, was not worth trying to win with love. Anyone must feel that that was impossible with one so wholly given over, so entirely corrupt. That was what he had meant probably by saying, "If he had only known her a little sooner." Before her whole nature was debased. That was what he had meant, of course. She had understood it all now. Sometimes she had thought it might have meant something else. How she had wronged him! Dal was an ideal character once more, impressionable but not impressed by evil, susceptible but only susceptible of good emotions. And she was as unworthy to be loved by him as she had once thought Lord Talboys to love herself.

"Now I know better," she said. "Vile thing that I am, I should only make a good man miserable. I may quite satisfy all his wishes as his wife. He shall have enough of my beauty and my singing. Only then he must not caress me. I don't think I could bear that. I think I should scream. Even now I never shake hands with him but in gloves. His caresses would poison me, I think. Otherwise I'll do what I can for him." Even Margery, with all her worldly knowledge, thought thus of marriage beforehand.

She walked up and down in the starlight till gradually the day began to dawn. It was getting lighter—lighter, such a white sickly light. Margery thought the day as much disliked dawning as she disliked seeing it. Yet she was glad the night was over. The night had seemed like many years to her. She supposed it would al-

ways be like that when she was Lady Talboys. At last she thought she must be going in, gardeners and stable boys were about, and somebody might see her. She fancied she must look wonderfully pale and dishevelled. She turned to go in. Just as she was stepping on to the broad walk, which she must cross to enter by the little side door, whom should she see at the other end of it but Allan? She started, and drew back, but he had already seen her, and was coming towards her.

"Margery, my own dearest, how are you? Is your head better? I am afraid not, since you have been out so early. My darling, how pale you are!"

Margery was indeed deadly white; her heart was beating so fast, she could hardly hear what he said. He had put his arm round her, and now, as he drew her nearer towards him, her head fell on his

shoulder, and rested there. It seemed to do her good, the touch of his strong, steady shoulder.

"Don't move, Allan," she said. "I feel better now than I have done all night."

As they were standing now, he could not see her face, but he knew by her voice that she was in pain.

"My poor darling, I am afraid you have suffered horribly," he said.

"Yes, horribly, Allan. Too horribly. Recollect that always, that I suffered much. I cannot go on with it. I must make up my mind."

"Margery," said Allan, with his voice trembling, "if you think it would break my heart to give you up, you must not think of that. I have long had it on my mind to tell you, only—only Miss Spluck asked me to wait a week."

"Miss Spluck asked you?" said Margery,

and raised her head from his shoulder, and looked into his face.

"Yes, she said she saw—of course, everyone saw—that our engagement was hateful to you," said Allan, breaking down, and speaking impetuously. "But she said —I don't know why she said it—she thought if I waited a week you might change your mind, and care to keep it on again. But it isn't so. It isn't so, Margery."

"She is very good, Lottie Spluck," said Margery, softly. "She is very noble, and kind, and true as steel." Her voice trembled. "That is why she despises me. But I love her, because she loves you, and you will love her, too, will you not, Allan?"

"Never—never! Never anyone but you," cried he, and put his arm once more round her, and pressed her to his beating heart.

"Allan," said Margery, looking up, "I am altogether unworthy of your love; do you not see that? A mercenary creature, who did not love you, but was yet willing to marry you for your position and your money."

"No, it was not that, Margery. It was not ever that," said Allan, sternly. "Not even you yourself shall say that to me. You either loved me, or you thought you did. You would not have listened to me else."

"Yes, you are right, Allan," said Margery, looking down very sadly. "It was neither your being rich nor grand made me listen to you. I'd known richer and grander men than you, and I had never listened to them. But recollect I am a Travers, Allan, and the Travers' blood has come out in me. Now I'm capable of anything, even of selling myself to such a man as Lord Talboys."

"Never—never, Margery," said Allan, firmly. "You might talk of it, but you'd never do it. You couldn't."

"But if I could, what would you do to me then? Would you leave off loving me?"

"Why, God forgive me," said Allan, "but I think I'd rather kill you there where you stand than that you should ever marry a man like Lord Talboys."

Margery looked up surprised and impressed. He spoke very solemnly, and Allan was not the kind of man to speak readily of killing anyone. He must be meaning what he said.

"You would, would you?" said Margery. "And what would you do to me if I told you I loved another, a man altogether too good for me, noble above other men?"

"Why, then, I'd ask you to let me kiss

you once more for the old time's sake, for the last time, and I'd say, God bless you, Margery, and may he make you happier than I could have! But what do you mean, Margery?—what do you mean? Is there another man?"

His lips were quite white, and his face drawn. The men who had hunted with Allan Stapleton all last Winter would not have known him as he was then. Margery's heart smote her. She recollected him, as he had used to be, when she had first seen him, and she saw what she had made of him.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing, of course. Only strange dreams and fancies. Now you must go and forget them, Allan. Sleep and forget them. For I believe you have not been in bed all night. Foolish fellow! because I had a headache. That is not a thing to grieve about. Come,

good night, go to sleep now. But kiss me first, kiss me first, and say God bless you!"

"God bless you, Margery!" said Allan.

He went in, and lay down on his bed, and fell asleep all dressed as he was, worn out by the emotions of the previous night. He did not wake till late. When he did, he rang for his servant.

"Please, sir, Miss Travers gave me this note for you. She said I was on no account to wake you, but she wanted you to have it as soon as you woke, sir."

The note was as follows:—

"You have decided. Thank God that I met you this morning! You should have killed me there, where I stood, for I had agreed to marry Lord Talboys. You cannot grieve for me when you hear that, and thus know how base a thing I am. I have gone now to Florence. Dalrymple Bruce

is the only man I have ever loved or could love. If he will have me, he shall; if he holds me too worthless, I can still earn my bread honestly by singing. Do not fear that I will ever disgrace you by even talking of selling myself again. The woman you honoured with your love will never let herself be won by anything lower. God bless you, Allan, as I know He will, for you deserve it. If God will hear the prayers of one so weak and base as I am, He will teach you soon to see how far better worth Miss Spluck is than I could be, and then you will make her very happy, for she loves you dearly. The one thing I shall care to hear is that you are happy. Thank you—thank you for all your exceeding goodness to me, more than man ever showed to woman before. Do not think I have not felt it. Do not think I do not honour and respect you. Do not think,

even, that I do not love you, or it would not break my heart to leave you. And whatever you do, Allan, do not think ever to come after me or see after me. Recollect I have gone to another man, and that I pray that you may one day forget you ever knew Margery Travers. I did not intend to go away to-day when I saw you this morning. I am not so bad as all that—to have deceived you then, if I had been thinking of it, when I met you."

Allan read the letter through, then he fell back on his pillows again.

"Close the shutters," he said to the servant. "Do you not see it is quite dark? What is the use of opening the shutters when it is night?"

The noonday sun was shining brightly, and the man stole up and looked at his master, but Allan did not seem to notice him. After a few moments the man

stole away, and told Miss Stapleton he was afraid her brother was delirious.

"Have you anything to do with this?" she asked of Lord Talboys. She had hitherto not announced to anyone what had happened, but preserved a stolid impenetrable silence most unlike herself. The servants all knew it by this time, but not even Sir James and Lady Stapleton knew that Margery had gone off by the morning train.

"To do with what?" asked Lord Talboys, looking rather guilty.

"Do you not know that Miss Travers left this house this morning, taking everything belonging to her with her, and leaving nothing but a note for my brother and this parcel—I suppose her diamond star for you, Miss Spluck?"

"Left this house this morning!" cried Lord Talboys. The veins on his forehead

seemed to start into prominence. His consternation was so genuine that there was no possibility of suspecting him of collusion. Una thought he would have a fit, and rang for a glass of water.

Then she went to her brother's bedroom. There was no doubt that Allan was delirious. A doctor was sent for, but before he came, Una had possessed herself of the contents of the letter in Allan's hand.

Later in the day she left her brother, and seeking Lord Talboys, said to him, quietly,

"I must condole with you, Lord Talboys. I find Allan is not the chief sufferer, and that it is you Miss Travers would have married, if the fit had not taken her to join Mr. Bruce at Florence. He will be very much embarrassed when he sees her, I expect."

"Very much embarrassed, I daresay,"

said Lord Talboys. He looked wretched, and gazed supplicatingly at Una.

"You know she'd have made you miserable, Lord Talboys."

"Yes, I know she would."

"I don't pity you in the least."

"But, Una——"

"Don't call me by my name, my lord. You paid a rubbishing milliner's bill for me the other day, certainly, but that does not give you the right."

"I thought I was to have paid them all," moaned Lord Talboys.

"I thought so too," said Una, with provoking gravity.

"Won't you let me?"

"I ask nothing better," said Una. "Anybody may pay my debts, and welcome."

"But it isn't only that I want, Una."

"Well!"

"Won't you forgive me? She turned my head, indeed she did; she got into it like champagne. She'd have made me miserable, I know she would. You're the wife to make a man happy, Una!"

"So I think," said she.

"Well, won't you, then?"

"Lord Talboys, it is all very well talking like that now, but Allan knows that girl was going to marry you, and though he is delirious now, he won't be so long, and you don't think he'd ever give his consent?"

"Don't ask it then. What do you want to ask your brother's consent for? I'll settle anything you like upon you."

"How much?"

"Every penny I can. I'll have all the emeralds reset. It is a pity they won't suit you as well——"

He stopped short.

"As well as pearls and opals," said Una, calmly. "Thank you, Lord Talboys; that is very considerate of you, I am sure. They are not heirlooms, fortunately, I think. I shall expect to see them all changed into pearls and opals; full value, mind. I mean to have the very handsomest pearls that were ever seen in London. Emeralds don't suit me. You'll make arrangements, please. One more thing, how much pin-money?"

"How much do you want?" asked Lord Talboys. It seemed the easiest way of coming to the point. He did not care about bargaining.

"I'll take a night to think of it," said Una. "You'll write to your lawyer at once, if you please. Perhaps you had written to him already. It is very easy to change the names; only it must be done as quickly as possible. If I am once married,

Allan will keep it dark for my sake; but if he hears of it beforehand, he's fit to publish it in every Club in London, and then you'll never see me Lady Talboys. I should have to take poor Dick, and I'd much rather have you; you'd suit me a deal better! Really, Dick's conversation is too heavy, and I hate drunken scenes in plays even; they are worse in real life. Now you'll suit me very well, and I shall suit you a great deal better than that girl. What ever made you such an old goose as not to see that?" said she, playfully.

"Because I was an old goose, I suppose," moaned Lord Talboys. "Certainly you're the wife for me, Una. You understand me to a T, and you don't make scenes. Any other woman would have made a scene out of all this."

"Yes, of course," said Una. "So silly! I hate scenes as much as you do. Now

I must go back to Allan. He's not very bad, so make haste."

"To think of my getting a girl to run off with me at my age!" said Lord Talboys, rubbing his hands. "But I don't look it. I don't look it, certainly. No one would guess me more than forty."

What would he have thought if he had seen Una standing quite still, her hands clasped, her eyes trying to gaze into Futurity with an earnestness and an intensity such as he had never seen in her face, whilst she involuntarily spoke her thoughts aloud, "God grant that I may die before he does," and had known that she was thinking of himself? It was a tear that she brushed away as she raised her hand to her face. "Poor old Talboys! who would believe that any woman in the world would turn to him for protection and peace. But,

thank God, I have got him. Now I feel safe. If only I may die before he does!"

BOOK II.

TRIED.

CHAPTER I.

MISS SPLUCK HAS A LARGE FORTUNE.

THERE are people whose lives run very smoothly on and on, on and on, ever smoothly to the great sea of Eternity, just as they started very smoothly from the little reed bed, their cradle. We are told of these people, in whose lives comes no sudden stop, no cataract, and there are some pieces of music, some pictures, some faces even, that seem to justify the report. But with such lives as these I have little sympathy. When the music in which they are expressed is played before me, I hear sounds, nothing more. When the

pictures are exhibited to me, they awaken in me no interest. The lives I understand best are those which are never the same again, it may be after a conversion, it may be after a great sorrow, or it may be, and, thank God, it sometimes is so, after a great sin.

When Margery Travers rang the bell in the early morning, while the newly risen sun was gilding moss-grown trunk and Autumn leaves with the beauty of another day, herself with large black rings under her eyes and a colourless face, all telling of the night before, she said to the startled servant,

"I think the dog-cart is going to the station this morning to fetch a parcel. I must go in it. Will you take my boxes? They are ready corded. And, James," it was Allan's own man, whom she had walked out into the hall and met, "do not wake

Mr. Stapleton this morning. Let him sleep as long as he can. But give him this letter as soon as he wakes. It is to explain why I have to go to town this morning. I must catch the eight o'clock train."

Then the sin and the sorrow came into several lives never to be effaced again; into her own, into Allan's, into Dalrymple's, into Lottie's, yes, more remotely, but not less surely, into Una's and Lord Talboys'. Yet her departure that morning was not the cause of it all, any more than that particular last drinking bout was the cause that sent the writhing wretch yonder into delirium tremens; that last bout was rather the consequence, the result of all the others, yet without it he might have lived on a sane man. So it is always. Habits engender habits, principles engender principles, and those without habits or principles, the

slaves of opportunity, find opportunity at last a tyrant master, whom they must obey unhesitatingly.

Thus Margery Travers stole away like a culprit, in the early morning, from the house she had entered to be its daughter and its mistress, and Allan Stapleton lay tossing on his bed half stupefied, half delirious, and Sir James uttered a volley of round oaths, and Lady Stapleton went to her room with a sick headache, and Una made arrangements to elope with Lord Talboys before Allan should be about again. And of all the people who heard of it, poor little Lottie, who had never liked Margery, never made friends with her; the little American heiress, whom her enemies—and the pretty spoilt child had many enemies—laughed at as bad style, and pronounced to be fast in a manner that any English girl would not even care to

imitate—Lottie alone sorrowed for Margery, whilst at the same time she was unutterably shocked at the step the other had taken. As to the others of the Priory party, they were greatly puzzled what to do under the circumstances, which were somewhat without precedent. Dick Woodward, after all, showed as much tact as anyone. He said he had heard that his yacht wanted some looking to before it could be ready for a cruise, perhaps Miss Stapleton would drop him a line if she and her friends would care to join him in a week or so. In the meanwhile, he thought he must go and look after her himself. This gave the rest of the party an opening, each to think of some plausible excuse why one and all were wanted elsewhere. Only Ned Walmsley was in too great a hurry to tell all about it in town to think of any. He had returned a few days before, and

Lady Mary had augured no good when she had seen him.

Lady Mary was not severe upon Margery, but in her mercy she ignored her.

"What a dreadful thing for her to do!" said Lottie. "She could so easily have broken off her engagement, or—or——"

"People who are quite unconventional—" began Lady Mary, in a suave tone, and then fell into a reverie.

"It is all very well saying that, but she is a woman all the same," said Lottie. "Do you think she has really gone to join Mr. Bruce? I thought she had refused him."

"Very likely," said Lady Mary, blandly. "Was there ever a woman yet who did not repent the answer she made the man who asked her to marry him?"

"I guess we'd better all make up our

minds to be miserable all our lives long, then," said Lottie.

"The great question that has to be solved is, whether women were created to make men happy, or for some higher aim," continued Lady Mary. "Hitherto the first has always been assumed, and the world has gone wrong."

"Why, Lady Mary, what will you say next?" cried the little Yankee, angrily. "Over in America everyone knows girls were made to have a good time of it, and they just do with us. And as to making men happy, I should like to know whether the young fellows ain't the brighter for seeing all the girls laughing and making fun, as they do with us."

Lady Mary sighed gently as she noticed the dauntless sparkle of the saucy blue eyes, and the little toss of the head. Whilst girls were like this what was the use of all

her theories about woman's mission, theories that were before her time, but which are already a little out of date now.

"I always knew that girl would do something desperate some day," said Una, in a tone of lamentation, as she came into the room.

Lady Mary ignored Margery, and asked,

"How is your brother now?"

"Much the same," said Una, her stereotyped answer. "I believe American girls are the only ones that can really be trusted after all. As to Margery, she was half an Italian, and we may think ourselves lucky, I fancy, we haven't had daggers produced, and all sorts of things."

"I am so sorry for her," said Lottie, feelingly.

"Oh, so am I," said Una, much more indifferently. "As to that Mr. Bruce——"

"He is a good young man," interrupted Lady Mary.

"A good young man!" exclaimed Una, surprised.

"Yes, he is a good man," repeated Lady Mary, "and like most good men he'll do some of the most astounding things before he settles down into simple goodness. But the person I can't forgive is his mother."

This was going too far back for the others, and Lottie interrupted here to say she had written to Mrs. Van Voorhis to tell her she would leave the Priory next day. Then Una went on her knees to Lottie, and besought her, her little white face upturned in the most supplicating manner, her arms twined lovingly about her, and her soft cooing voice saying,

"You must not leave us in our trouble. Oh, Lottie, I never thought of you as a Summer weather friend."

On this Lottie yielded, and agreed to stay, but she held herself very straight, and never after this made the slightest

comment on Margery's departure, and always found a dog to feed, or something of that kind to do, when Sir James broke into outspoken objurgation. Only once Lottie broke silence. Sir James had been cursing the beautiful face, and the false heart it covered. He said,

"With all that confounded pride of hers, who'd have thought of her running off with the first low artist fellow who looked at her? Well, Allan is well out of it, and that I shall tell him, when he is about again. A girl who could go off without so much as a word to him."

"You do not consider how terribly she must have suffered, before she brought herself to do it. Mr. Stapleton is not the sort of man whom any woman could leave without knowing it would break his heart, Sir James," and then Lottie left the room. She never spoke on the subject

again. Sir James was a little puzzled, but Una explained it all in calm, purring tones.

"She is so dreadfully in love with Allan herself, poor Lottie! Well, it will all come right now, I daresay."

Next day Una did not appear to pour out the coffee at breakfast, but her maid had the effrontery to come in with a very pretty message that Miss Stapleton had a headache, and would Miss Spluck pour out the coffee for her? It was Una's message, but the maid knew well enough how false it was. However, thus it came about that Lottie took the position of daughter of the house, and it was not till about twelve that they got the telegram:—

"*Una Talboys to Sir James Stapleton.*

"I was married to Lord Talboys this morning at St. George's. I will write to my mother this evening."

The telegram was characteristic even to being one word short of the regulation number of words. Sir James was so taken aback, he grew quite white. Lottie sprang forward, and asked what was the matter. She was really frightened to see the obstreperous, irascible old gentleman thus suddenly stricken into silence. He did not answer her, but handed the telegram in silence to Lady Stapleton. Then he went out to the kennels, without even whistling to a single house-dog to follow him. That the gentle-looking, white-faced Una, of whose real character her father had no more conception than he had of the man in the moon, should have acted thus contrary to all the general usages of society astonished Sir James even more than Margery's disappearance. Besides, it was yet more inexplicable. However, if the women-folk were all mad, there were

at least the hounds that were not. Sir James betook himself to them, but he was sad at heart. He had no very strict notions about right and wrong, but he was the kind of man to whom the notion that any woman, connected with himself, could do anything unseemly, was simply monstrous. Now it seemed they were all doing it. As to Lady Stapleton, she took it very quietly.

"It is very odd of Una," she said, "but after all it saves a great deal of trouble. Weddings always make a great disturbance in a house."

"I think I shall write and ask Mrs. Van Voorhis to join me here," said Lottie, with her lip trembling. She did not offer to go away again, but the Priory no longer seemed a fit house for her to stay in alone.

"Do, my dear," said Lady Stapleton, very sweetly. "That will be very nice.

Then I shall have no anxiety about you. And you will do the honours to your friend; of course you feel quite at home here now. So I shall have no trouble. You see, it would not do for me now with Allan so ill. After all, he is my only son, and though he is better now, it has been a great shock—a great shock. Not but that that girl would have made him miserable. It seemed such a pity. I told her so. And I thought it made a great impression. Now, my dear, don't you think you might go and sit in the book-room a little? Allan was to move in there to-day. Take him these flowers with my love. You see, I daren't go and sit with him myself, for fear he should ask about Una. The doctor said he was not to be agitated. And you could so easily pretend not to know."

So Lottie took the flowers to Allan with

Lady Stapleton's love. It was the first time she had seen him since Margery had gone away, and her heart beat a little. She could not understand the questioning way in which Allan looked at her as she came in. He was thinking of Margery's words, "For she loves you dearly." Could it be so? If so, how Lottie must have suffered! He could measure it now by the exceeding bitter grief he was feeling himself. And he looked wistfully at Lottie. Surely she did look slighter and paler than when he had first known her. And there could be no doubt that she hung her head when she met his gaze, and looked very sorrowful. And surely Allan thought she seemed as if she had been crying.

"Thank you," he said, as he took the flowers, and held her hand a trifle longer than was necessary, as he looked into her down-drooped face. Lottie could not re-

sist pressing the hand that held hers, as a little sign of the deep sympathy she felt for him. But she did not dare to say anything, and only spoke about the flowers.

All that day it was generally Lottie who sat with Allan, and next day it was Lottie, who insisted that he might just as well lie out of doors, and arranged chairs and cushions and an umbrella. Several times Allan looked round, as if expecting some one; at last he asked,

"Where is Una?" Una had been very attentive to him during his illness.

Lottie stammered, and looked down, then she grew red all over, and said,

"She sent down word yesterday that she had a headache."

"Is that quite the truth, Lottie?" asked Allan, looking quickly up at her. "I beg your pardon, Miss Spluck."

"Lottie is far prettier," said she. "I

wish you would call me Lottie, Mr. Stapleton. Spluck is such an ugly name, and I know no one likes it."

"Indeed I do," he said, "for I have known you by it."

That was very prettily said of Allan, and in her confusion over it, Lottie stooped, and began plucking at blades of grass. But she took notice that he did not ask her to call him Allan.

"Only you will forgive me, Lottie, for thinking what you said just now—— Where is Una?"

"I believe she is on board the *Spirit of the Foam*," said Lottie, still rather hesitating.

"What! with Lord Talboys!" cried Allan, leaning on one elbow, and looking at her so excitedly, Lottie was quite frightened.

She thought it best to tell him the

truth at once. After all, it was but what everyone had expected. It could not excite him much, though the manner of it was strange.

"She is married to him," said Lottie. "She said they both thought it would be so much better to escape all the fuss and worry of a grand wedding, and that—that it would be better for you too," added Lottie, hurriedly. "So Una went up to town yesterday, and was married to Lord Talboys at once."

Allan was looking at her fixedly. He was, in truth, not seeing her, but simply divining his sister's motive for her runaway marriage. He had divined it now. Una knew he knew of Lord Talboys' intended marriage with Margery, and believed that he would rather divulge his knowledge of it than consent to her own. There had never been much sympathy be-

tween Allan and his sister, but still she was his sister, she was a woman, a very young woman, and such a premeditated act of degradation filled him with horror.

"Never mention her name again," he said sternly, to Lottie. "I shall never see her again. Let me forget, if possible, that I once had a sister."

"Oh! Mr. Stapleton, this is not like you," cried Lottie, holding out both her hands in deprecation.

Allan took hold of them.

"Child, you do not understand. You do not know what infamy you are talking of. How should you? How came you to be a woman! So different from all the others, so different! True as steel," he murmured.

Lottie crimsoned. "What makes you say so?" she asked.

"She said so. The very day she went

away. The last time I saw her," said Allan. He was half speaking to himself now, half forgetting Lottie's existence, moaning as he spoke.

"Miss Travers said so?" said Lottie, speaking rather quickly, while a pink colour came into her cheeks, and a light shone from her eyes. "That was very good of her." She spoke half bitterly, then quickly, more kindly. "Very generous. For I never made friends with her. Sometimes I am sorry now," added Lottie, ingenuously. "She had no one to help her, no one but you. And you she couldn't ask——"

Lottie broke off, Allan was watching her so jealously, drinking in every word she said so thirstily. It was the first time since she had gone away that anyone had spoken to him of Margery except in condemnation. It seemed to him strange that Lottie should

be the first person to speak of her sympathetically.

"Do you recollect telling me how it would break your heart to set her free from her engagement?" asked Lottie, impulsively. "It nearly broke hers to go, I am sure of it."

Allan covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"I told her about it," he said, "I told her how it was at your request I had not set her free before. She was free—she was really free when she went away," cried he, lying for the first time, in a vain attempt to save the good name of the woman he loved.

"Was she?" said Lottie, looking gravely at the grass. She knew by the very tone of his voice that it was not true, that Margery had not accepted the freedom he had offered to her, was yet engaged

to himself when she ran away to Dalrymple. Lottie knew better than to believe him, but she did not care to look at the man she loved, and disbelieve him. Just then there was the step of some one upon the grass, and Lottie looked up. "Oh, Mrs. Van!" she cried. "My dear, dear old Van!"

And there was a tall, very American-looking, elderly lady, with a little stiff face that had once been pretty, but now looked wizened, and with little stiff curls on either side of it, kissing and embracing Lottie, and holding her off to look at her, and declaring, "Why, Lottie, you're lovelier than ever," and then kissing her again, and then laughing, and then crying, and feeling her curls, and saying, "My! but they're soft. I haven't felt anything like them since I saw you, child," and then looking into her eyes to see if they were as blue as ever,

and then pronouncing her thinner. "Why, child, you're quite fallen away. I guess you've wanted me to take care of you," and then beginning all the kissing and embracing over again.

Till he saw it all, Allan had not realised how little they had all made of the spoilt young heiress. Surely she must have felt as if all the world had grown very cold around her of late, and as if she were very lonely! He wondered she had stayed so long at the Priory. What they all said must be true, and it must be that—But now at last Mrs. Van Voorhis took notice of him, and advanced to shake hands with him, greeting him just as cordially and affectionately as if she did not know that a great misfortune had befallen him. Most people are a little awkward and stiff when they know this. Not so the cordial American. She was just as friendly as if she

had not known him to be in distress. Only people who have been in deep sorrow know how rare this is. At the same time she glanced at Lottie, and thought inwardly that he had every consolation that this life could afford. She could not doubt that matters would soon be arranged between them, for Lottie had never made any secret of her preference for Allan in the old days, when, poor child! she had believed that she had nothing to do but choose, and she could have any man she liked for her husband or lover. She did not believe it now, but she still meant to marry Allan, because—but she shall explain why in her own words hereafter. For the present let it suffice that she was in love with him.

Thus the days passed, and Allan was well again, and actually went out hunting the first meet of the season, but did not

take any delight in it, as his father had hoped he might, neither did he ride hard, as many of his friends had prognosticated. He looked a little pale and very grave, and if his horse had taken as little interest in the matter as its rider did, I think he would have been soon left behind; but as it was, he kept a fair average place, and then he came home in the evening and told Lottie, in answer to her inquiries, that his head ached a good deal, and he did not think he should hunt any more that season.

Certainly Lottie's staying so long at the Priory required some explanation in the eyes of the world. She had remained there almost a month now since Margery's departure, but the excuse given was that she was going to Italy for the Winter, and the Autumn was so mild it seemed a pity to be moving south yet, while at the same time hardly worth while to move anywhere else first.

Sir James pressed Mrs. Van Voorhis warmly to stay; he quite took to the Yankee lady, and felt the Priory would be desolate indeed when left alone to himself and Lady Stapleton, and the love-lorn Allan, whom nothing seemed to rouse; while Lady Stapleton said, in her gentle way, "Why shouldn't things go on as they are?" and Allan generally suggested the excuse of the weather, the Autumn was so very mild. Lottie certainly was not difficult to prevail upon, and Mrs. Van Voorhis would not have moved for worlds. Not only was she supremely comfortable, as she had never yet been since she crossed the Atlantic, but she was quite determined that her darling Lottie should have her own way, as she always had had, and that way evidently now was that she should console Allan Stapleton for having been jilted by Margery.

So they stayed on and on, and naturally Allan and Lottie did numberless little things together, for how could it be otherwise, when they were the only two young ones of the party? But though Allan rode out with Lottie, played croquet with Lottie, nay, even went through the penance dire of carrying young scratching kittens for her to play with and admire—Lottie, who was so like a kitten herself, had a special fancy for kittens—yet he never rallied from his deep depression, but went about always pale-cheeked and leaden-eyed, very kindly and gentle in his manner, very thoughtful for others, but never smiling himself, nor even attempting to join in any bit of fun that might be going on.

"You want change, that's what you want," said the practical Mrs. Van Voorhis, in her harsh but cheery tones to him one day. "You should go right away from

here. Why don't you come abroad with Lottie and me? We should be glad of an escort."

"I should like nothing better," said Allan, but so gravely that Lottie's heart ached.

"Then that's settled," said her *chaperon*. "You won't be long about your preparations, will you? We must be off soon now. Lottie's beginning to cough."

"Is she?" and Allan's quick, anxious glance might easily be mistaken for love by eyes so eager to read it as such. Mrs. Van Voorhis was quite satisfied. "But though I should like nothing better than to accompany you, you don't consider, Mrs. Van Voorhis, that Miss Spluck is not quite like other young ladies. She has a large fortune——"

"A large fortune!" cried Lottie, springing from her seat and walking across the

room. "I wish it were at the bottom of the sea, if you also see nothing in me but that."

The colour rose to Allan's cheeks, and his lips quivered. He had not at all recovered his health yet, and the least agitation seemed to be too much for him.

"If you think I see nothing in you but that," he said, with his voice trembling, "it makes it more difficult for me to say what I—I intended."

Lottie heard the tremble in his voice, and stood still and penitent before him.

"What was it?" she asked, gently, laying her hand soothingly upon his shoulder. That was the sort of thing that made people pronounce Lottie such bad style. It was a pity she should do it in society certainly, but no one had ever reproved her for it, and she did it quite unconsciously.

Allan rather liked it now. What man

rather ill and very sad does not like being caressed by about the nicest girl he has ever known, and who he cannot but feel loves him with her whole girlish heart? He put up one of his hands, and took hold of the long slender fingers that rested on his shoulder.

"Only that with your fortune—I will not call it large, since it seems to hurt you," he said, smiling, "what you do is always sure to be talked of. And I could not travel with you without more or less compromising you, which I should not care to do, unless you gave me the right."

"The right!" said Lottie, growing crimson.

"Yes, the right," repeated Allan, very softly. "And if you go away from the Priory, I think you must give me that right, Lottie. For you know all my past, there is no need for me to say anything

about that to you, and it is only you who make life supportable to me now."

"Oh, no, do not say that, Allan," cried Lottie, kneeling beside him now, and hiding her face in the sofa cushions.

"Why! should you not like to be always with me?" asked Allan, bending over her, and trying to uncover her face.

"Yes—yes," sobbed Lottie. "Always with you—always. I *should* like it." Then for one moment he saw a tear-stained face, and the next moment she had run away.

"She is such a strange, excitable child," said Mrs. Van Voorhis. But Allan did not hear her; he was sitting still, white and immovable, with a pain like an ice-cold knife cutting him to the heart. The tone in which Lottie had said, "I *should* like it," made him fancy that she did not think even now he cared about it as much as she did, that she knew that he did not even

now love her as much as he might. And Allan knew he did not. But that Lottie should know it, and suffer under it, was terrible to him. And after all it seemed so hard. What was he that any girl should care for him? Just a common-place young man, without any particular brains or looks to boast of, and with tastes no way remarkable, hitherto, but for being too extravagant for his means. Whereas, there was Lottie, so exquisitely girlish, so pretty, so admired, so rich, and, above all, so sweet and loveable in all her ways. Allan knew her ways well by this time; he had only spoken the truth when he had said to her that life without her would be insupportable. He had learned to depend upon her sympathy, to need the thousand pretty little acts of kindness she showed him all day long. Life without her would be a blank and a burden too heavy to be

borne. Of old life with Margery had always seemed to him as if it would be something better than Paradise. I do not think he thought about being happy with Lottie now, only that he could not bear life without her. But that she should be unhappy he could not bear either. He exerted himself in every way for her sake. A more attentive lover could not easily be imagined, and Lottie seemed very happy, and everyone was quite satisfied. The only thing that struck anyone as odd was that when Allan insisted on all Lottie's money being settled upon herself, she made no objection.

"She knows nothing about money," said Mrs. Van Voorhis, anxious to exculpate her from all possible blame, for she herself was a little ashamed. She had thought Lottie would have behaved with unexampled generosity.

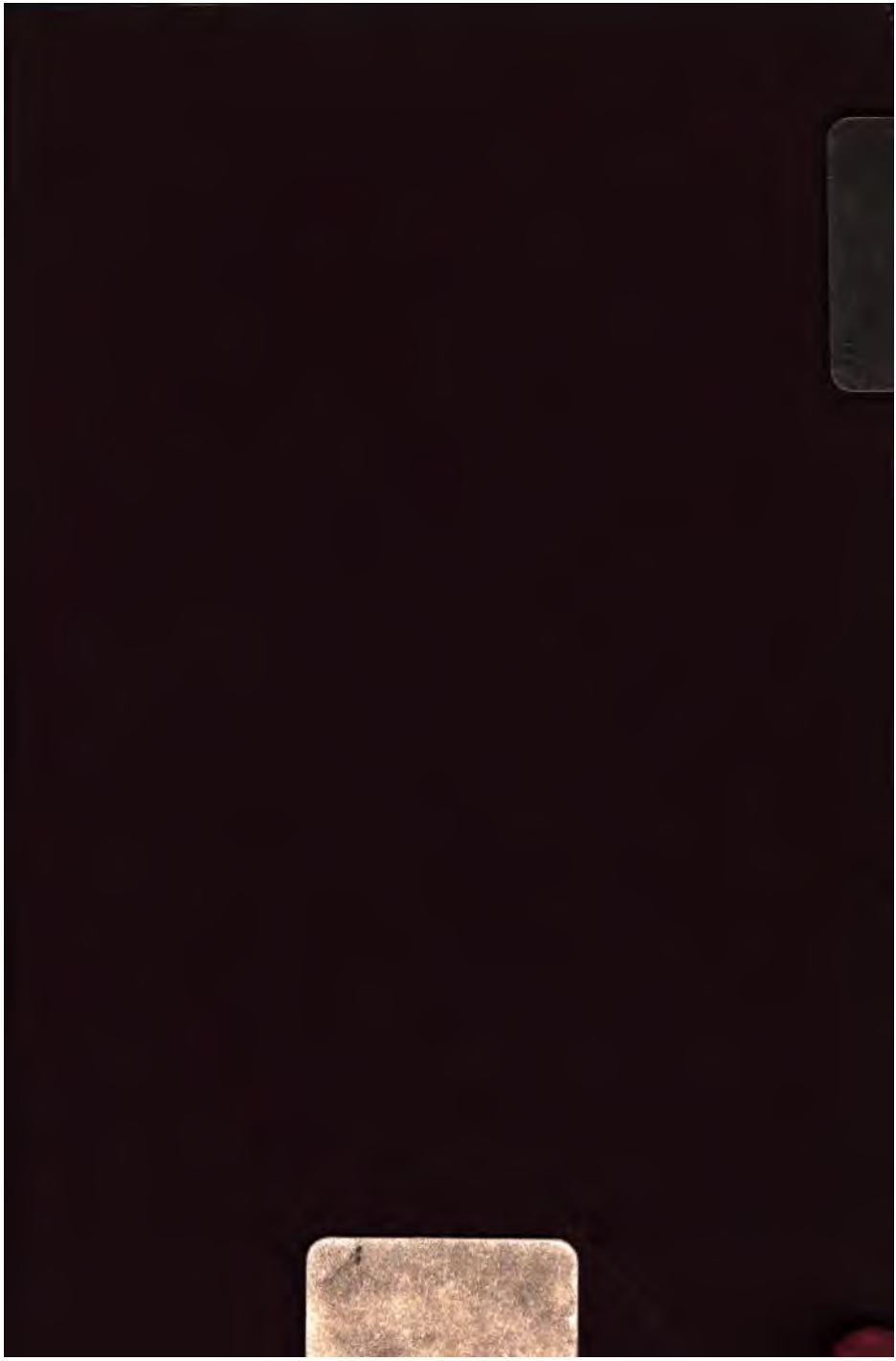
But Lottie treated it all as if it did not matter in the least. She only kissed Allan when he said he should insist upon it, and said lightly, as if she were granting him a favour, but one of which she could not think twice,

"It shall all be exactly as you like."

It was soon settled; the marriage should not be yet awhile, they should travel for a little time, and first they must go to Paris to get Lottie's trousseau. All this time nothing was heard of Margery, and no one ever mentioned her now. Una had come back in the *Spirit of the Foam*. She was going down to the Priory for a little, and then she and Lord Talboys were going to take possession of the old family place, that had been preparing during their absence. Una had taken care that her trousseau also should be arranged while she had been yachting. And when she

stepped on shore at last she was a bride complete.

"How lucky those Stapletons are, both marrying money!" was the comment. "But the brother does not seem to care about settlements so much as the sister. After all, I believe those Americans are rather close, and don't like to part with money out of their own hands. That is always the way with people who make it—*nouveaux riches*, and such like."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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